

PAKISTAN: A GLOBAL FLOOD • JONATHAN SCHELL

# THE Nation.

RECONSTRUCTING

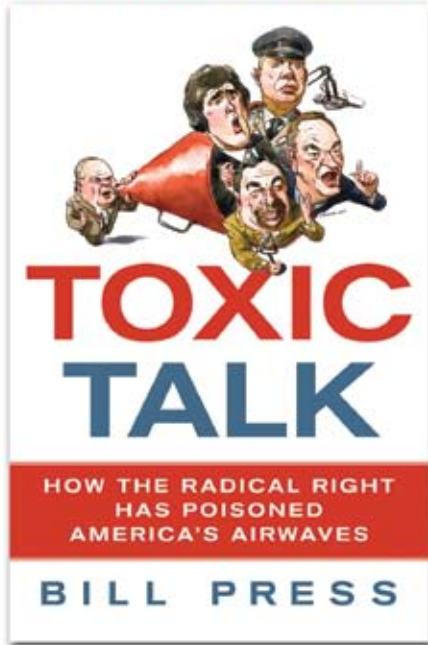
## THE STORY OF THE STORM

HURRICANE KATRINA  
AT FIVE

REBECCA SOLNIT

SEPTEMBER 13, 2010  
TheNation.com

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## Letters

### Inequality—Connect the Dots...

AMES, IOWA

I am surprised that your special issue "Inequality in America" [July 19/26] skirts the giant elephant in our midst: the obscene piece of the economic pie going to the military. Military spending is not a good way to create jobs or distribute wealth. As Eisenhower said, "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed."

DEBORAH FINK

CHICAGO

The various contributors to this special issue restate the argument *The Nation* has been making for months now: wealth to the top, loss of jobs, solution is Keynesian stimulation, etc.

One has to admire how Robert Reich manages to describe the past twenty years without stating the obvious: class war is being waged, and both parties have chosen to be on the same side. No, this not a win-win situation where all *The Nation's* contributors need to do is show Washington power brokers that green solutions will benefit their corporate sponsors. No, it is not a question of Obama having hired the wrong economic advisers because he didn't know Galbraith in Texas would love to serve. Hello! It is not a question of getting the truth out to the people with power.

I've been a union carpenter for thirty years. It is a depression out here. The local media say 40 percent of construction workers are unemployed. Of roughly 38,000 union carpenters, only 11,000 qualified for their health benefits last quarter. (You qualify if you worked 250 hours the previous quarter or 1,000 the previous year.) Whatever numbers you believe, and most of us don't believe the official statistics, a lot of people are hurting. When will you get outside the box that limits political and economic debate to the difference between Keynes and Hayek? And please, forget about trying to persuade

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the power brokers. This is a war. Why not join the counterattack?

MYRON PERLMAN

### Harry Hangs the Laundry

DIXON, N.M.

In response to Katha Pollitt's "Women on Top?" [July 12], I would argue that having two parents/members of the household working full time spells disaster for the planet. The economic recession—conservation by default—has done more to decrease our carbon emissions than all the resource-consuming alternatives. As Americans, a lot of us pay to work, contributing to credit card debt, stress, bad food choices and climate change. Ecologically speaking, someone needs to stay home, but it shouldn't have to be the woman—this is where men still need to step up to the plate. Hanging up the laundry and forging a relationship with a local grower, then cooking that food with love and care—these are things that shouldn't be optional in our country. We should strive for more balance in work and home life for women and men. Better for us—and better for the planet.

FELICITY FONSECA

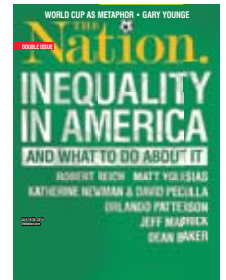
### Troubled Oil on Water

LOS ANGELES

In "A Hole in the World" [July 12], Naomi Klein asserts that the main issue in the BP oil "spill" is "our culture's...claim to have...command over nature." This assessment shifts blame to a "culture" or a "them," when the real culprit is a world full of individuals, Klein included, who do not comprehend the consequences of their actions.

Control over nature is a philosophical issue that few people contemplate. More likely, people consider whether they would prefer to walk six miles to the store or drive. Most drive without considering any ramifications beyond the loss of \$3 to their pre-

(continued on page 24)



# For Digital Democracy

Americans will be forgiven for presuming that the fight to maintain equal access to the Internet, or “net neutrality,” could not possibly be as consequential as our wrangling over

matters economic, social and military. It’s hard to get charged up for a fight on behalf of “neutrality.” Yet if citizens do not engage—and fast—decisions made now about how we communicate could warp every political debate in the future. This is why tech-savvy activists are so unsettled by an arrangement between Google and Verizon to subdivide the Internet in a manner that serves their corporate purposes but cheats the promise of digital democracy.

Google and Verizon want the FCC and Congress to allow media giants to transform wireless communications into a digital version of a bad cable TV package. Instead of a free and open Internet that will take Americans where they want to go—thanks to the longstanding neutrality principle, which guarantees equal access to all websites and applications—the Google-Verizon deal would permit Internet service providers to speed up access to some content while leaving the rest behind. Such “pay for priority” would allow big business to buy speed, quality and other advantages—which would not be merely commercial. Now that the Supreme Court has afforded corporations electioneering rights equal to those of citizens, decisions about how we communicate have a profound political component to them.

Imagine if BP could pay to have its messaging dominate digital discussion about the best policies for regulating offshore drilling and carbon emissions—to such an extent that searches for information about “clean energy” would steer straight to corporate spin. This is not a conspiracy theory; big media companies have already barred content about political issues, as Verizon did when it blocked a text-messaging application developed

by NARAL Pro-Choice America. With Google in the game, the threat expands exponentially. If its deal with Verizon is allowed, the SavetheInternet.com coalition of consumer, civil rights and advocacy groups argues, “it would divide the information superhighway, creating new private fast lanes for the big players while leaving the little guy stranded on a winding dirt road.” Worse still, the coalition explains, allowing corporations to write the rules would turn the FCC into a “toothless watchdog, left fruitlessly chasing complaints and unable to make rules of its own.”

That scenario could strangle the Internet’s civic and democratic promise while supercharging corporate dominance of the digital discourse about our nation’s future. But it doesn’t have to happen. The most wired members of Congress, led by Democrats like Edward Markey and Anna Eshoo, have urged the FCC to reassert its authority—by altering flawed Bush-era classifications that narrowed regulator options—and define broadband as a telecommunications service. Such a move would restore the legal framework for net neutrality and protect the rights of citizens and consumers. Markey gets it exactly right when he says, “No private interest should be permitted to carve up the Internet to suit its own purposes. The open Internet has been an innovation engine that has helped power our economy, and fiber-optic fast lanes or tiers that slow down certain content would dim the future of the Internet to the detriment of consumers, competition, job creation and the free flow of ideas.” The FCC must move immediately and comprehensively to assure that the public interest, as opposed to corporate greed, defines our digital destiny.

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## Pakistan: A Global Flood

"This is a disaster on many levels," the *New York Times* wrote in its first editorial on the colossal floods in Pakistan. "It is a tragedy for millions of people. It also is a strategic threat—to the stability of Pakistan's nuclear-armed government and to American efforts to suppress Al Qaeda." Why? Because the "extremists," by rendering assistance to their fellow Pakistanis, threaten to "use the crisis" to "sow more resentment toward Islamabad and Washington and win new adherents for their nihilistic cause." In other words, the floods—engulfing upward of 20 million human beings—were to be seen chiefly as a public relations opportunity to outcompete the Islamists in delivering aid, all in the name of advancing the "war on terror."

### COMMENT

A pattern of instant, if perishable, conventional wisdom was thus fixed for broad swaths of commentary on the floods: it consisted of a quick bow to the human cost, then a fulsome exposition of the security implications for the United States. On *PBS NewsHour*, correspondent Gwen Ifill noted that "as the humanitarian crisis worsens, new questions are also being raised about whether the government of Pakistan is equipped to handle both this and ongoing regional security concerns." Ifill fretted that the military campaign was "being replaced by relief work" and asked, "Does one preclude the other?" Would the saving of people get in the way of the killing of people? *NBC Nightly News* showed John Kerry, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, commenting at a news conference in Pakistan that it was "important that Pakistan be stable. It's important for all of our security that the insurgents not be able to use this in order to gain ground."

In its news pages, meanwhile, the *Times* reported that executive branch policy-makers, too, were concentrating on the public relations aspects of the catastrophe. Eric Schmitt found that "as the Obama administration continues to add to the aid package for flood-stricken Pakistan...officials acknowledge that they are seeking to use the efforts to burnish the United States' dismal image there." And President Obama's special representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan, Richard Holbrooke, remarked on *Charlie Rose*, "If we do the right thing, it will be good not only for the people whose lives we save but for the US image in Pakistan." Or, as the *Times* summed up the matter in its editorial, "This is a battle for hearts and minds. It is one that Pakistan's government, and the United States, must not lose."

The obvious thing to note about this conventional wisdom is the want of elementary sympathy. Everyone has seen the images of vast territories underwater and the desperate, stranded people. How, then, can we speak, like advertisers, of our "image" or, like out-of-control counterinsurgency experts, of winning "hearts and minds"? Surely what's needed is to save people, and let the PR chips fall where they may. Very likely it was awareness of these issues that led Holbrooke to revise his position and say to *NewsHour* anchor Jim Lehrer, "I need to underscore that, today, we're doing what we're doing for Pakistan out of pure humanitarian need."

A second response to the conventional wisdom is a feeling of intellectual strain and weariness. It's not mentally easy to subordinate the fortunes of 20 million sufferers to some tangential gain

# Noted.

**PRIMARY PALIN:** The no-brainer headline from the latest round of partisan primaries reads: “**Sarah Palin Wins.**” And it does appear that the 2008 Republican vice presidential candidate has engineered a remarkable upset in her home state of Alaska, where she backed a newcomer’s challenge to Republican Senator **Lisa Murkowski**. Palin’s “constitutional conservative,” **Joe Miller**, led Murkowski in incomplete returns at press time. No matter what the final numbers reveal, the takeaway has to be that mainstream Republicans have as much to fear from Palin as Democrats do. That’s significant for the remainder of the primary season and the fall.

The knowing headline from the August 24 primaries, which played out from Alaska to Florida, however, would have to be: “**Bill Clinton Wins.**” The former president waded into the bitter Florida Democratic Senate primary when it seemed that Congressman **Kendrick Meek** might well lose to eccentric billionaire **Jeff Greene**. A \$30 million spending spree by Greene allowed the “meltdown mogul”—who made his money trading credit default swaps and betting on a financial meltdown—to be competitive enough to throw the race into question.

But Clinton refused to let Meek go down; he headlined five fundraising events, appeared at three rallies in Florida and recorded last-minute robocalls to gin up support for the Congressman. Clinton’s commitment kept Meek in the running as revelations regarding Greene’s financial dealings and personal life chipped away at the billionaire’s poll numbers. In the end, Meek secured a 57–31 landslide that gave the Democrats their only African-American Senate contender with a chance of winning this fall.

Palin and Clinton will face off in Florida, where she’ll be backing Republican **Marco Rubio**—in a race that also features Governor **Charlie Crist** running as a moderate independent. And Palin will be elsewhere, providing star power for the GOP in a volatile campaign season where her role will be far more significant than that of the party’s former presidential nominee, Arizona

Senator **John McCain**. McCain easily won renomination in his state after a primary contest that split Palin and the Tea Party; she backed her ex-running mate while many grassroots conservatives supported **J.D. Hayworth**. The result provided more evidence that the Tea Party doesn’t amount to much when Palin fails to attend.

The question as the primaries wind down is whether Democrats will be savvy enough to employ Clinton to full effect in the fall. Even those of us who disagree with the former president on a host of issues have come to recognize during this cycle that—in stark contrast to the cautious Obama team—Clinton has moved with boldness, energy and a good deal of success in races across the country.

JOHN NICHOLS

**A MAP OF THINGS TO COME:** With so much buzz around the Congressional midterm elections, little attention has been paid to the thirty-seven governor’s races this year, an oddity given that the winners will oversee a sweeping state-by-state redistricting process after the 2010 Census, which will redefine the political map for the next decade.

Perhaps that’s why **Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp.**, the parent company of **Fox News**, recently donated \$1 million to the **Republican Governors Association**, run by Mississippi governor and 2012 presidential aspirant **Haley Barbour**. Murdoch’s was the third million-dollar-plus donation to the RGA this summer, following a \$1.48 million check from the **Michigan Chamber of Commerce** and \$1 million from oilman **David Koch**. The RGA has already raised \$58 million this cycle, significantly more than the **Democratic Governors Association** and far above the previous off-year election in 2006.

Democrats currently control twenty-six governor’s mansions. But in the thirty-seven races this year, Republicans are favored in twenty-three, according to projections by the *New York Times*, with twelve states listed as tossups. **Barack Obama** won all of them but one (Georgia) in 2008.

News Corp says its donation should not be read as a sign of political bias. “There is a strict wall between business and editorial,” says a company spokesman, a claim that’s hard to take seriously given Fox News’s

incessant Obama bashing. Media conglomerates have long tried to buy favor through campaign donations, but the amount of money flooding the system has continued to increase since the Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* decision. Something tells me we ain’t seen nothing yet.

ARI BERMAN

**GREETINGS, PARTNER:** The **Nation Institute**, a nonprofit media center with a long and historic partnership with *The Nation*, named a new president on August 19, **Andrew Breslau**. Since 2006, Breslau has served as the executive director of **City Futures**, the parent organization of the **Center for an Urban Future**. During Breslau’s tenure, the center issued groundbreaking reports documenting the importance of immigrant entrepreneurs to the nation’s economy and the need for cities to invest in strategies to alleviate income disparity.

Previously, Breslau worked at **CNN** and the **Democratic National Committee**, and for Manhattan borough president **Ruth Messinger**. He was the founding associate director of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (**FAIR**). He began his career at **Mother Jones**.

“The voices that The Nation Institute promotes and nurtures and the issues they raise have never been more important,” says Breslau. “Together, we will continue to challenge conventional wisdom, uncover uncomfortable truths and provoke the kind of vocal debate our nation so desperately needs.”

**KUDOS TO KATHA:** “Subject to Debate” columnist **Katha Pollitt** has been awarded a prize for lifetime achievement by the thirty-first annual **American Book Awards**, hosted by the **Before Columbus Foundation**. The prize celebrates her contributions as an essayist and a poet. This is Pollitt’s first American Book Award; she will be honored on September 19 at a ceremony in San Francisco. Pollitt is the author of several collections of essays; her most recent books include *Learning to Drive: And Other Life Stories* (2007) and her second collection of poetry, *The Mind-Body Problem* (2009). Other ABA winners this year include **Amiri Baraka**, **Dave Eggers** and **Pamela Uschuk**.

in the war. The aim of strategy should be to protect lives, not the other way around. The connection between cause and effect is in any case tenuous. To win the war in Afghanistan, we're regularly informed, we must win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people; but it turns out that may not be possible without winning Pakistani hearts and minds first. Does anyone imagine that if US helicopters drop water bottles in the south of Pakistan it will somehow cancel, as if by the working of some ghastly arithmetic, the deep hatred that much of the population feels for the rockets fired by US drones in the north? The mind grows tired trying to comprehend, much less believe in, this chain of weak links. We are left with a picture of an enormous, violent Rube Goldberg machine—the American empire—pursuing goals both peripheral and dubious at exorbitant human cost.

No overarching strategy, imperial or otherwise, should be needed to inspire help to Pakistan. Nevertheless, there is another global perspective that can help make sense of the crisis and inform policy without falling into heartlessness or absurdity. As it happens, it was identified by Holbrooke in his interview with Lehrer. He suggested what a growing number of scientists have also suggested—that the floods were “a manifestation of global warming” and “possibly linked to the fires outside Moscow.” Although a direct connection between any single catastrophe and global warming cannot be proved, it's clear by now that warming has increased the likelihood of such events. As Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, vice president of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, has commented, “Extreme events are one of the ways in which climatic changes become dramatically visible.”

The International Group on Attribution of Climate-Related Events, composed of leading representatives of meteorological organizations, met near Boulder, Colorado, to weigh the connections between overall warming and specific catastrophes. Unlike the attenuated chains of supposed cause and effect in Washington's futile and phantasmal imperial project, the chains the scientists studied in Colorado are powerful and direct. In the world they and others are delineating, a dense web of pressures—imposed not only by climate but also by limits on food, water and

energy, among other things, and destined to shape the human future—opens into view. For example, industrialized nations, the source of most pollutants now warming the earth, have a clear responsibility for the flooding, and thus have a powerful additional reason, beyond ordinary human compassion, to give assistance. These are connections that count, and they have nothing to do with terrorism or anyone's image.

JONATHAN SCHELL

*Jonathan Schell, the Doris Shaffer Fellow at The Nation Institute, is the author, most recently, of The Seventh Decade: The New Shape of Nuclear Danger.*

## America Hates Children



Summer is waning, and thoughts turn from the scent of the sea or cut grass, the whir of a lazy fan, the kiss of a breeze against damp skin, to the lockdown we call school. Hold that thought for a moment and direct your attention to Montana, where the Helena School District spent the summer in a contest over sex, over what children should and shouldn't know and when—and what adults might gain from it. The occasion was a draft health curriculum covering everything from handwashing to carpooling, with just enough in between about love thyself and thy neighbor to set some people's hair on fire.

Why should first graders learn that “human beings can love people of the same gender & people of another gender”? Why should second graders learn that “fag” and “homo” can be hurtful? Why should fifth graders learn that sexual activity “includes but is not limited to vaginal, oral, or anal penetration”? And why the hell should anyone learn that “some values are universal, others differ”?

Public meetings were impassioned. Fox News and national talk-radio jumped on the case, followed by Tea Partiers and the state Republican fundraising machine. Superintendent Bruce Messinger says he has received a few thousand e-mails. The school district has about 8,000 students. Striving to keep discussions local, he asks correspondents, “Where are you? Who are you?” Not atypically, someone will write, “I'm a minister in Missouri.”

Messinger says most middle and high school parents support the curriculum, just as nationally parents overwhelmingly want schools to deal with sexuality and what impinges on it. Montana teenagers' rates of sexually transmitted disease, pregnancy and alcohol, tobacco and meth use are up. Helena's middle and high school risk surveys (limited as they are, being self-reports) show troubling rates of bullying, depression, suicidal thoughts, forced intercourse, violence and a significant amount of drugging and sex play among middle schoolers, 7 percent of whom said they were 9 or younger when they first had intercourse. The children could surely have been fooling with the grown-ups, but since budget cuts pretty much eliminated health education from Helena's middle schools ten years ago, administrators and teachers don't have a lot to go on, and they are feeling their inadequacy.

When the school board presents its curriculum revisions in September, we may hear further adult pangs over the theft of innocence, while the kids roll their eyes.

## Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

### Harry Reid Says That the 'Ground Zero Mosque' Should Be Built Somewhere Else

The leader of the Senate, Harry Reid,  
Now runs against a wacko. In the lead,  
But not by very much, he felt the need  
To pander on the mosque. This craven deed  
Was done, apparently, so he'd proceed  
As leader of the Senate Harry Reid.

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From the landmark book *Grow Young with HGH* comes the most powerful, over-the-counter health supplement in the history of man. Human growth hormone was first discovered in 1920 and has long been thought by the medical community to be necessary only to stimulate the body to full adult size and therefore unnecessary past the age of 20. Recent studies, however, have overturned this notion completely, discovering instead that the natural decline of Human Growth Hormone (HGH), from ages 21 to 61 (the average age at which there is only a trace left in the body) and is the main reason why the the body ages and fails to regenerate itself to its 25 year-old biological age.

Like a picked flower cut from the source, we gradually wilt physically and mentally and become vulnerable to a host of degenerative diseases, that we simply weren't susceptible to in our early adult years.

Modern medical science now regards aging as a disease that is treatable and preventable and that "aging", the disease, is actually a compilation of various diseases and pathologies, from everything, like a rise in blood glucose and pressure to diabetes, skin wrinkling and so on. All of these aging symptoms can be stopped and rolled back by maintaining Growth Hormone levels in

the blood at the same levels HGH existed in the blood when we were 25 years old.

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Growth Hormone first synthesized in 1985 under the Reagan Orphan drug act, to treat dwarfism, was quickly recognized to stop aging in its tracks and reverse it to a remarkable degree. Since then, only the lucky and the rich have had access to it at the cost of \$10,000 US per year.

The next big breakthrough was to come in 1997 when a group of doctors and scientists, developed an all-natural source product which would cause your own natural HGH to be released again and do all the remarkable things it did for you in your 20's. Now available to every adult for about the price of a coffee and donut a day.



GHR now available in America, just in time for the aging Baby Boomers and everyone else from age 30 to 90 who doesn't want to age rapidly but would rather stay young, beautiful and healthy all of the time.

The new HGH releasers are winning converts from the synthetic HGH users as well, since GHR is just as effective, is oral instead of self-injectable and is very affordable.

GHR is a natural releaser, has no known side effects, unlike the synthetic version and has no known drug interactions. Progressive doctors admit that this is the direction medicine is seeking to go, to get the body to heal itself instead of employing drugs. GHR is truly a revolutionary paradigm shift in medicine and, like any modern leap frog advance, many others will be left in the dust holding their limited, or useless drugs and remedies.

It is now thought that HGH is so comprehensive in its healing and regenerative powers that it is today, where the computer industry was twenty years ago, that it will displace so many prescription and non-prescription drugs and health remedies that it is staggering to think of.

The president of BIE Health Products stated in a recent interview, I've been waiting for these products since the 70's. We knew they would come, if only we could stay healthy and live long enough to see them! If you want to stay on top of your game, physically and mentally as you age, this product is a boon, especially for the highly skilled professionals who have made large investments in their education, and experience. Also with the failure of Congress to honor our seniors with pharmaceutical coverage policy, it's more important than ever to take pro-active steps to safeguard your health. Continued use of GHR will make a radical difference in your health, HGH is particularly helpful to the elderly who, given a choice, would rather stay independent in their own home, strong, healthy and alert enough to manage their own affairs, exercise and stay involved in their communities. Frank, age 85, walks two miles a day, plays golf, belongs to a dance club for seniors, had a girl friend again and doesn't need Viagra, passed his drivers test and is hardly ever home when we call - GHR delivers.

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Yet some things are stripped away when sex goes to school. Sensualism, awe, funk, God or, if you prefer, the raw power that Charles Bukowski described as “kicking death in the ass while singing.” They are the same qualities that were stripped away when sex put on a suit and went to work for everything from pharmaceuticals to training bras; the qualities the grown-up world discarded on the short walk from the sexual revolution to the bank, dropping the kids outside the shop window and saying, “Just say no” or, among liberals, “The schools will handle it.”

If, as Helena’s school superintendent says, the messages being sent about sex are “an adult worry,” the logical conclusion is to let the children be and send the adults back for sex education. Let adults see the world they’ve created as a child might: the impossible bind they’ve set up, telling boys to be thoughtful and kind, then worrying they might be queer, handing them a vulgar electronic game, chuckling over *Two and a Half Men* or *Family Guy* or any other popular display of maleness as something stupid and mean; telling girls, “It’s too soon,” then treating them to Brazilian waxes or dragging them through stores where women’s dresses look as if they were designed for children and children’s clothes seem designed for hookers; telling the kids, “We want you to be safe,” then accommodating to about 14 million of them in poverty, the single greatest risk factor, as author Judith Levine notes, for every other risk against which sex ed is supposed to arm them.

And while adults are in remedial sex ed (starting with *Sex at Dawn*, Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jethá’s persuasive bash-up of just about everything we think we know about “human nature”), let children begin at the beginning again, with their bodies.

Let the little ones appreciate the feel of sand through their fingers or a feather’s trace against their skin. Let them listen to the rain, keep a diary of sounds, of smells. Feed them a pear, a fig, a Concord grape, but not fear. Teach them to savor, and then teach them to cook. Teach them to read beautiful, complex things as they grow: “Song of Songs” and Hafiz; Dickinson and Whitman; *Spring Awakening* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Let them think about how music makes them feel; confuse them about beauty with Michelangelo and African fertility totems, Giacometti and Japanese prints, Rodin and Rubens. Send them to the gym to stretch and sweat and shower, and have the phys ed coach instruct them on care of the body, from nutrition to drugs, sprained ankles to STDs.

Allow them a sensual education, and allow sexuality to be what it is in life, implicated in biology and history, ethics and culture—and, face it, in the secret play of children. Have stand-alone sessions not for what most sex ed now is—“disaster prevention,” says Monica Rodriguez of SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States)—but for what a group of troubled girls told me they’ve never had, a place to talk about the real-life dialectic of desire and confusion, “the emotional part.” Try to love them. Hug them, touch them, because a kid who gets much physical affection from infancy through adolescence is the least likely to grow up to be a violent creep. And level with them that almost everything about sexuality is political, which is why almost none of the foregoing can take place anywhere but in exclusive experimental schools.

From the hubbub in Helena, and an intriguing curriculum item for high schoolers to “understand that erotic images in

art reflect a society’s views about sexuality,” I had expected a far-out document. In fact, in the sexuality section, freedom and curiosity make only token stands on the familiarly scorched, eminently fundable curricular landscape of strangers, dangers, pathogens, abstinence and suffering. Still the right rallied. I asked Messinger whether the experience ever made him think about chucking sex ed and integrating the essential learnings into science, social studies, phys ed, etc.

“There’s a sensitivity to teaching health” among teachers for whom it’s not a specialty, he said; also, parents would protest because if sexuality were so embedded in other life subjects, how could kids opt out? So biology teachers are scared of reproduction, parents are scared of a classical education and all but perverts are scared of touching the kids.

In that mad trinity lies the abdication of the left. It wasn’t until the early 1990s that almost every state created mandates for sex education. “The right was ready,” Rodriguez says. “What they always wanted was to get sex; AIDS helped them do it.” And they wanted to get sex because they wanted power. Rodriguez isn’t giving up on schools, “but we can’t just rely on schools.” She works with Girl Scout troops, summer camps, churches, community groups. The unfinished business of the sexual revolution awaits. The alternative is more stumbling down the path of dumb and dumber.

JOANN WYPIJEWSKI

## @<sup>THE</sup>Nation.com

Let’s get this straight once and for all: regardless of what Billy Graham’s son claims or what millions of Americans believe, Obama is not now, nor has he ever been a Muslim, writes Leslie Savan in **The False and ‘Seedy’ Claim That Obama Is Muslim**.

Each week *Nation* contributors appear on GRITtv to expand on their reporting for the magazine. This week on **The Nation on GRITtv**: Richard Kim on gay marriage in California and the Islamic cultural center in New York, Robin Templeton on “anchor baby” baiting and Kai Wright on access to public housing.

The decision overturning Proposition 8 is full of careful reasoning in support of same-sex marriage. But is it written so broadly that it invites the Supreme Court to weigh in, and what will happen if it does? asks E.J. Graff in **How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Proposition 8 Lawsuit**.

The violent floods in Pakistan have left a staggering 20 million homeless. On Peter Rothberg’s “Act Now” blog, find out **How to Help in Pakistan**.

The burgeoning sex industries in Syria and Jordan are thriving because of the Iraq War. The United States could speed resettlement for Iraqi women who are trafficked, but it hasn’t, write Sebastian Swett and Cameron Webster in **US Dodges Obligation to Help Iraqi Women Trafficked Into Sexual Slavery**.

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# Eric Alterman

## The Terrorists Win

The 9/11 attacks brought out the best and the worst in America. It would be simplistic to argue that the best could be found in the reactions of individual citizens and the worst in the Bush administration, its apologists and its cheerleaders in the media... but it would be true.

Few who were in New York City that morning can forget the outpouring of heroism by the police force, firefighters and emergency medical technicians, along with all kinds of everyday people, who dropped everything to rush to Lower Manhattan—some traveling thousands of miles—to help. Ditto the statements of solidarity from around the world. Meanwhile, right from the start, the Bush administration sought to manipulate the truth about the attacks and its response, democratic accountability be damned. Nine years later, we still have never been given a true accounting of what actually took place on that day or why the Bush administration, in clear contrast to the impression it later tried to create, took so many panicky, counter-productive measures in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. Why, for instance, was Bush able to keep reading to those kids, potentially endangering their lives, when he was a likely target himself? Why, if given a tip about a possible attack on Air Force One, would Bush be rushed to Air Force One? What kind of government lies to rescue workers about the safety of breathing the air in a disaster area? (I brought my kid down there on the basis of those assurances. She was 3 at the time.) And what about the plan to invade Iraq, hatched internally within days of the attack, purely because we could? Were two wars, instead of one, really what the country needed in order to recover?

Many in the media also sought to exploit the attacks. A tiny minority on the left—including contributors to this magazine—took the attacks as an opportunity to tell America we had it coming, but these voices were so vilified and drowned out by condemnation that they functioned in the public only as political punching bags. On the right, ideologues and profiteers successfully steered the debate toward aggressive warmaking. Just days after the attacks, *Wall Street Journal* editors demanded that President Bush get to work immediately to exploit the tragedy for political gain, calling upon Bush to “spend his windfall of political capital” on such things as tax cuts for the wealthy, offshore drilling, free trade agreements and the approval of his political nominees. Right-wing jihadists like Seth Lipsky, writing in the same pages, called for US attacks “from Afghanistan to Iran to Iraq to Syria to the Palestinian Authority.” *The New Republic*’s Marty Peretz declared, I kid you not, “We are all Israelis now.” And Andrew Sullivan sounded like he wanted to round up “decadent” Gore voters on both coasts for the crime of having voted for the guy who actually got the most votes.

The rest is well-known: the Bush administration deceived the

country into invading Iraq, undercutting its military efforts in Afghanistan—around which virtually all Americans were united—and helping to “spawn a new generation of Islamic radicalism,” as the National Intelligence Council, representing the views of sixteen US intelligence agencies, found in 2006, confirming its explicit (albeit ignored) prewar warnings. Next came civil war, Abu Ghraib, rendition, waterboarding, official McCarthyism, wiretapping and the slow destruction of key constitutional liberties.

But something else happened as well. Remember Lt. Gen. William “Jerry” Boykin, who, one day after being promoted to deputy under secretary of defense for intelligence, boasted to a church audience that his Christian God was “bigger” and more “real” than that of the Muslims, who pray to an “idol”? Nine years after the attacks, the hatred of Islam and contempt for civil liberties has infected much of post-9/11 America. How else to explain the number of citizens who are demanding that we deny American Muslims the right to build a community center two blocks away from where the attacks took place? Sure, the demagogues deserve some credit. Newt Gingrich equates Muslims with Nazis and sputters on like a crazy man about “Islamic triumphalism” in America and continues to be treated like a respected statesman by the mainstream media. Fox News hosts combine ignorance, avarice, prejudice and McCarthyite malice toward Islam to a degree that might have impressed Bernard of Clairvaux. *Newsweek* puts a scare cover

headline of “A Mosque at Ground Zero?” superimposed above a photo of the burned-out towers, when its editors know very well that Park51 is not a mosque and is not at Ground Zero. And pitiful old Abe Foxman, head of the Anti-Defamation League, decides that discrimination on the basis of religion is all right after all. Were I bin Laden, I’d be dancing in my cave.

And perhaps he is. Evan Kohlmann, a terror analyst who tracks militant websites, recently told the *New York Times* that supporters of Al Qaeda have seized on the Park51 fight “with glee.” Radical online forums place it on par with the Florida pastor who wants this September 11 to be “Burn a Koran Day,” no doubt proving to many potential Al Qaeda soldiers that we are indeed the enemies of a billion Muslims worldwide, and not just the few who support the violent extremists.

George W. Bush, who kept a lid on this kind of thing among members of his administration, has remained strangely silent this time around. Perhaps he is afraid it will eat into sales of his forthcoming memoir. Perhaps he is afraid to speak on any topic at all without Dick Cheney pulling his strings. Whatever the case, the evidence is clear. Nine years later, Ground Zero remains an undeveloped eyesore and America a less free nation, less true to its own ideals, less honest with itself, less trusted by the rest of the world and more fearful and hostile to Islam than ever. It gives me no pleasure to admit this, but in these respects, at least, it is not us but the terrorists who have won. ■





**F**ive years later we're still coming to terms with what happened in New Orleans on August 29, 2005, and thereafter, struggling to get the facts straight and to figure out what it said about race, disaster and even human nature. How we remember Hurricane Katrina is also how we'll prepare for future disasters, so getting the story right matters for survival as well as for justice and history.

In August 2005, 90,000 square miles of the Gulf Coast were devastated; more than 1,800 people died; 182,000 homes were severely damaged in New Orleans alone, where 80 percent of the city was flooded. Hundreds of thousands went into an exile from which some will never return. A great and justified bitterness arose in African-Americans who were demonized by the media and the government and who felt that they had not been treated as citizens or even as fellow human beings. An African-American woman at an antiwar rally in the nation's capital a month later carried a sign saying, "No Iraqis left me on a roof to die."

The widely told initial version of Hurricane Katrina was a lie and a slander, based on rumors and racism, and it's been falling apart steadily ever since. For the past two years an antithetical version has been overtaking it, one that tells the real story of

who went crazy and who was in danger in the days after the hurricane. It has gained more ground than I ever imagined it would, and the history books may yet get this one right.

### **When the Media Went Mad**

The story of Hurricane Katrina as originally constructed served authoritarianism, racism and a generally grim view of human nature. It was first told hysterically, as though New Orleans had been hit by a torrent of poor black people or had become, as Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times* put it then, "a snake pit of anarchy, death, looting, raping, marauding thugs." An overwrought *Huffington Post* columnist even spread rumors of cannibalism, while many major media outlets repeated rumors of snipers firing on helicopters. These rumors were never substantiated, but they interfered with the rescue operations nonetheless.

The gist of these stories was that in the absence of authority, people went berserk; the implied solution was the reimposition of authority—armed, ruthless and intense. Heavily armed Blackwater mercenaries were dispatched to New Orleans, where, as Jeremy Scahill reported in this magazine, they shot at

citizens with little fear of repercussion. While the focus was on young men of color as the peril, police and white vigilantes went on a murder spree that was glossed over at the time.

The AP reported on September 1, 2005, "Mayor Ray Nagin ordered 1,500 police officers to leave their search-and-rescue mission Wednesday night and return to the streets of the beleaguered city to stop looting that has turned increasingly hostile." Only two days after the catastrophe struck, while thousands were still stuck on roofs, in attics, on overpasses, on second and third stories and in isolated buildings on high ground in flooded neighborhoods, the mayor chose protecting property over human life. There was no commerce, no electricity, no way to buy badly needed supplies. Though unnecessary things were taken, much of what got called looting was the stranded foraging for survival by the only means available.

The mainstream media fractured under the pressure of reporting such a huge and complex story. Journalists on the ground often wrote empathic and accurate stories and broke out of their "objective" roles to advocate for the desperate and rail against systemic failures. Meanwhile, further away, credulous television, online and print reporters spread lurid rumors about baby rapists and mass murders and treated minor and sometimes justified thefts as the end of civilization. They used words like "marauding" and "looting" as matches, struck over and over until they got a conflagration of opinion going.

They, along with government officials at all levels, created the overheated atmosphere of fear and hostility that turned the task of rescuing stranded people into an attempt to control a captive population. New Orleans became a prison city; the trapped citizens became prisoners without rights. Those in the Superdome, for example, were prevented from leaving the stinking, scorching zone as people dropped from heat and dehydration. The literal prisoners, adult and juvenile, in the New Orleans jails were abandoned to thirst, hunger and rising floodwaters. Hospitals packed with the dying were not allowed to evacuate; citizens were not allowed to walk out of New Orleans on the bridge to Gretna because the sheriff on the other side was there with cronies and guns, keeping them out.

The stories of social breakdown were quietly retracted in September and October 2005, but the damage had been done. A great many found new confirmation of the old stereotypes that in times of crisis people—particularly poor and nonwhite people—revert to a Hobbesian war of each against each.

## The Crimes That Counted

If you believe what happened after Hurricane Katrina was all about the masses running amok, then the proper response is pretty much the vigilante one: arm yourself, treat your neighbor as your enemy, shoot first, ask questions later. But the evidence suggests that the people running amok were the ones who were supposed to protect the public. They were the sheriff on that bridge to Gretna, the corrupt and overwrought policemen who shot unarmed civilians and Louisiana Governor Kathleen

Blanco, who said, "I have one message for these hoodlums: these troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so if necessary, and I expect they will."

Real people got caught in the crossfire. Take Donnell Herrington, a 33-year-old former Brink's truck driver who stayed behind to help his grandparents and who later rescued many others by boat from their flooded housing project. Herrington was walking to the evacuation site in Algiers Point when a white vigilante with a shotgun attempted to murder him. Herrington was shot in the neck, hit so hard the blast lifted him off the ground, and then shot again in the back as he tried to escape. His friend and cousin, who were walking with him, were also injured by the buckshot and then chased down by racists who terrorized them. An African-American couple in the neighborhood drove Herrington to the nearest hospital, where a surgeon stitched him up. According to that surgeon, Herrington nearly bled to death from pellets to his jugular.

His assailants were part of an organized militia that presumed any and all black men were looters and decided that they were justified in administering the ad hoc death penalty for suspected or potential petty theft. No one reported on these vigilante crimes in the first round of coverage.

## The Past Is Equipment for the Future

The July 15 federal indictment of Roland Bourgeois Jr. is stamped FELONY, and the charges at the top of the page are "conspiracy, civil rights violations, obstruction of justice, false statements and firearms violations." What that means is that this white man allegedly tried to murder Herrington and his companions because they were black, because they were walking through his neighborhood and because in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina there weren't a lot of rules, and those who should've been enforcing them had gone mad.

"It was the plan and purpose of the conspiracy that defendant Roland J. Bourgeois Jr. and others known and unknown to the grand jury would use force and threats of force to keep African-Americans from using the public streets of Algiers Point in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina," says the indictment. Bourgeois and other vigilantes were situated between the Coast Guard evacuation point and the rest of the city, picking off people who were just trying to get out. "Anything coming up this street darker than a paper bag is getting shot," the indictment charges Bourgeois with saying. He is the first, but may not be the last, of the suburban vigilantes to be indicted this summer.

These indictments are part of a package, along with two sets of indictments of police by Eric Holder's Justice Department, that came down just in time; the five-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina is also the statute of limitations for some of these charges.

The catastrophe's fifth anniversary is becoming an opportunity for a major re-examination of the colossal disaster uncovered by journalist A.C. Thompson's award-winning reporting, with a new Spike Lee documentary, *If God Is Willing and Da Creek Don't Rise*, and a *Frontline* documentary, both set to air in late August. I never thought I'd see the day. Early in 2007, when I started looking into what happened in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, it pretty quickly became clear to me that though the city had

*Rebecca Solnit wrote about Hurricane Katrina and four other major disasters in depth in her book A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster, just out in paperback.*

swarmed with journalists, none of them wanted to touch the crimes Bourgeois and his cronies had committed.

The evidence these journalists overlooked was everywhere. In September 2005, Malik Rahim, the ex-Black Panther who co-founded Common Ground Relief and who lives in the Algiers neighborhood, told Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now!* on camera about vigilante murders of black men. He showed her the body of a dead black man lying under a sheet of corrugated metal, bloated and decaying in the heat. Herrington testified about his near-murder in Lee's documentary *When the Levees Broke*, broadcast in 2006 on the first anniversary of the storm. At the end of the segment, he takes off his shirt so that the buckshot wounds welting his torso are visible, as is the long scar on his neck.

Some of the evidence I came across wasn't so obvious, but it wasn't hard to find either. I heard from staff at the Common Ground Health Clinic that vigilantes and their associates who came in for care confessed or boasted of crimes. Rahim gave me a DVD of a little-seen documentary in which some of the Algiers Point militia boasted of shooting black men. A few others told me stories that corroborated that the vigilantes had kept a body count. I acquired this evidence without really trying, while pursuing other stories entirely, which made me wonder what was up with the hundreds of reporters who'd come to New Orleans.

On March 1, 2007, I wrote to the best investigative journalist I knew, my friend A.C. Thompson, "Hey, I'm sitting on a kind of wild story, and I'd love to talk to you about it." He'd never been to New Orleans, and it wasn't until *The Nation* and The Nation Institute's Investigative Fund took an interest that A.C. got dispatched to the city. More than three years and dozens of trips to New Orleans later, A.C. has turned the city and the story of Katrina upside down. Without his work, a lot of people would've gotten away with murder and attempted murder.

A.C. uncovered a story no one in the media had touched—the police killing of Henry Glover, first reported on in these pages in December 2008 ["Body of Evidence," January 5, 2009]. He also joined forces with *Times-Picayune* reporter Laura Maggi, who reopened the Danziger Bridge case, in which police shot several unarmed African-Americans after the storm, including a middle-aged mother who had her forearm blown off, a mentally disabled man who was shot in the back and killed, and a teenage boy, also killed (several others were wounded).

Justice Department officials have charged eleven policemen for the Danziger Bridge case and five for the Glover case, and most recently sent warning letters to two more for the post-Katrina case in which Danny Brumfield was shot in the back and killed. In total they've opened up six civil rights cases for New Orleans police crimes post-Katrina, and a federal probe of the department is under way. With any luck, it's the foundation of the real story of what went down after the storm, as well as reform of what A.C. tells me is the most corrupt and incompetent police department in the country.

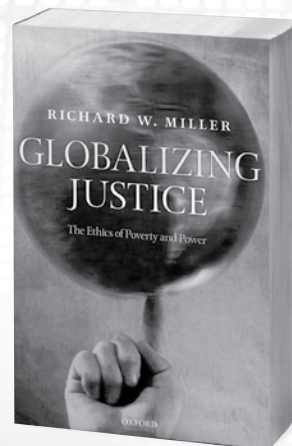
### Truth Emergencies

Truth may be the first casualty of war; it's certainly the most important equipment to have on hand in a disaster. There's the practical truth about what's going on: Is the city on fire? Is there an evacuation effort on the other side of town? And then there's

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# How ACORN Helped Save NOLA

by JOHN ATLAS

**A** week after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans—while government officials and charities were still discussing how to send aid to the area—ACORN was already moving into action. ACORN staffers quickly discovered that many displaced African-American homeowners were in danger of losing their homes. Banks were giving their middle-class, mostly white customers ninety days or more to make their payments, but borrowers who had subprime, high-interest loans (like many black homeowners in the Lower Ninth Ward) were given only one month. Three weeks after the storm, ACORN released a report exposing the industry's double standard and demanded meetings with lenders. Along with labor unions and consumer groups, it successfully negotiated plans to prevent foreclosures for dozens of homeowners. This campaign was only one of many victories, large and small, that ACORN achieved by mobilizing Katrina survivors to confront banks, insurance companies and public officials.

ACORN members' homes, in places like Houston, Little Rock, Birmingham, Vancouver and New York, became refuges for the Katrina diaspora. From its temporary headquarters in Baton Rouge, ACORN sent text messages to members' cell-phones and received 200 replies. Joe Stafford, a member from the Uptown New Orleans chapter, whose father had died in the floodwaters, fled to Houston with his girlfriend, Carmen, and their two children. They were staying at a two-bedroom apartment with four other families when Stafford received a message from ACORN organizer Steve Bradberry offering relocation aid. Stafford messaged back: "I watched my father die...and had to leave his body behind. I don't know where my mother is either.... I don't think she left the house, she loved that house, wouldn't leave it. ACORN helped her get that house. That's how we joined ACORN, by getting a house." In a few days he and his family were housed with Houston ACORN member Tarsha Jackson.

To plan the city's recovery effort, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin asked some of the region's power brokers to form a blue ribbon task force to make recommendations. The task force, which excluded community groups, emerged with a plan to shrink the city's population, sacrificing the hardest-hit neighborhoods to protect upscale areas from future flooding. It called for restoring the city's tourist attractions but paid little attention to the plight of poor and working-class residents, many of them scattered in cities hours away. ACORN launched a plan to save these communities by organizing residents to speak out. After the Nagin administration announced

that the city would demolish 50,000 homes in low-lying areas, ACORN plastered No BULLDOZING signs all over the Lower Ninth Ward. At one point, ACORN activists chased off a backhoe crew preparing to demolish a home. ACORN also sued the city to stop the demolition, and in January 2006 it won a court settlement requiring that homeowners be given the opportunity to appeal before any action was taken.

Beginning in December 2005, ACORN crews and volunteers began working day and night to repair the homes of member families in the threatened areas. ACORN's crews tore down moldy drywall, ripped up flooring and carted ruined possessions to the curb; then they stored salvageable belongings and put blue tarping on roofs to prevent further water damage and deterioration. Relying mostly on volunteers and private funding, ACORN's cleanup/house-gutting program saved more than 1,500 homes.

ACORN sued to ensure that the city's displaced, largely black population would have access to out-of-state polling places for municipal elections in the spring of 2006. A federal judge rejected ACORN's demand for satellite voting stations outside New Orleans, so ACORN organizers (along with other groups like the Metropolitan Organization) registered more than 20,000 absentee voters.

Within three months after the storm, ACORN formed the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association (AKSA), the only national grassroots group that represented the evacuees. AKSA drafted a platform and sent delegations of members to Baton Rouge and Washington to demand bolder and quicker action. They held public protests and press conferences and engaged in regular negotiations with FEMA officials to ensure that the agency continued to provide assistance to displaced survivors. Mixing confrontation and collaboration, ACORN only sometimes proved effective against a slow-moving, seemingly uncaring bureaucracy.

Since the 2008 presidential election, ACORN has been the victim of a ferocious attack by the GOP, Fox News and Andrew Breitbart, including false accusations of "voter fraud" and the infamous doctored "pimp and prostitute" videos. This storm ACORN couldn't weather. Although the organization was subsequently exonerated of any wrongdoing, it dissolved itself as funders and Democratic allies abandoned the group. ACORN was dismantled, but its legacy—in New Orleans and elsewhere—continues. One group, A Community Voice, led by former ACORN leaders Vanessa Gueringer and Gwen Adams, continues ACORN's mission in New Orleans, regularly confronting local officials over issues like policing and the rebuilding of the Lower Ninth Ward. The group is one of at least a dozen former ACORN affiliates that are now independent—but continuing the work of organizing the poor for power in cities across the country. ■

*John Atlas is the author of Seeds of Change: The Story of ACORN, America's Most Controversial Antipoverty Community Organizing Group, from which this article is adapted.*

the larger truth: What goes on in disasters? Who falls apart and who behaves well? Whom should you trust? Most ordinary people behave remarkably well when their city is ripped apart by disaster. They did in San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake; in New Orleans during Hurricane Betsy in 1965; in Mexico City after the 1985 earthquake; in New York City in the aftermath of 9/11; and in most disasters in most times and places.

Those in power, on the other hand, often run amok. They did in San Francisco in 1906, when an obsessive fear that private property would be misappropriated led to the mayor's shoot-to-kill proclamation; a massive military and national guard on the streets; and the death of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of civilians. Much like New Orleans ninety-nine years later, those who claimed to be protecting society were themselves the ones who were terrorizing and shooting. Earlier this year, Haitians were subjected to a similar rampage of what the disaster sociologists Lee Clarke and Caron Chess call "elite panic." For example, 15-year-old Fabienne Cherisma was shot to death in late January in Port-au-Prince for taking some small paintings from a shop in ruins, one of many casualties of the institutional obsession with protecting property instead of rescuing the trapped, the suffering and the needy.

Surviving the new era, in which climate change is already causing more, and more intense, disasters, means being prepared—with the truth. The truth is that in a disaster, ordinary people behave well overall; your chances of surviving a major disaster depend in part on the health and strength of your society going into it. Even so, countless individuals under corrupt governments, in New Orleans, in Mexico City, in Port-au-Prince, often rise to the occasion with deeply altruistic, creative and brave responses. These are the norm. The savagery of elite panic is the exception, but one that costs lives.

### Pieces of the Picture

After Hurricane Katrina, neoliberals and Bush provided a near-perfect example of Naomi Klein's theory of disaster capitalism. Everything from supplying buses for evacuation to tarps for torn-up roofs became an opportunity for Bush supporters to reap financial rewards. The city's public housing was torn down; the schools became charter schools, many along military lines. Told this way, what happened was pure loss, for the left as well as for the poor (though the schools before Katrina had been a mess). But that's not all that Katrina triggered.

During the storm and its aftermath, far more people did heroic things, and these, perhaps even more than the crimes Thompson reported on, are the key missing stories of the storm. Before he was shot, Herrington was one of hundreds who got into boats and commenced rescuing people stranded in the floodwater. Some in surrounding communities sneaked past authorities to start rescuing people in the drowned city. Young gang members kept mothers of small children and babies and elderly people provisioned. People banded together in schools and other surviving structures and formed improvisational communities whose members watched out for one another.

As days turned into weeks and then months, volunteers from around the country came to feed the displaced and rebuild the

city. Others took evacuees into their homes and helped them start new lives. Middle-aged Mennonites, young anarchists, musicians, members of the Rainbow Family of hippie communards, environmentalists, Baptists, Catholics, college students on spring break, ex-Black Panthers, movie stars, Habitat for Humanity carpenters, nurses and nearly every other kind of citizen showed up to save New Orleans. The outpouring of generosity and empathy was extraordinary. New Orleans was saved by love.

I first visited the city post-Katrina six months after the storm, and it looked as though almost nothing had happened since. The place was wrecked. Houses were smashed or shoved by floodwater into the middle of the street; many had the spray-painted markings of search-and-rescue teams, some reporting bodies or pets found inside. Cars were flipped over or propped up on fences and trees. Whole neighborhoods were abandoned and pitch-black at night, because even the streetlights were dead; and in places like the Lower Ninth Ward, returning residents had to make street signs by hand.

The place could have died; its fate was up in the air. It still is—with coastal erosion and rising seas, the petroleum industry's

**Most people behave remarkably well when their city is ripped apart by disaster. Those in power, on the other hand, often run amok.**

poisons, the troubled economy and corroded political system that were the city's problems before Katrina hit. Crime has risen, and New Orleans is a violent place. But it's also a vibrant place again. By some estimates more than a million volunteers have come through the city. Some who intended to come for weeks found they couldn't leave: they'd fallen in love with the gregarious sweetness of so many Orleanians and with the chance to make a difference. They've added their commitment to altruism and civil society to the city's mix. New Orleans always had a flourishing public sphere of festivals and street life and a private sphere of social organizations, but there has been a rise in civic engagement, in public meetings, neighborhood groups and focused organizations dealing with housing, the environment, immigrants' rights and more. Housing is scarcer and more expensive, but wages have risen since the labor pool shrank. New environmental initiatives are on the table or being realized.

Then there's the catastrophe's impact on national politics. The Bush administration's outrageous incompetence and indifference prompted a hitherto intimidated press and nation to begin criticizing not just the failed response but the Iraq War and the administration overall. The levees broke and so did the bulwarks that protected the president. As Bush's own pollster put it, "Katrina to me was the tipping point. The president broke his bond with the public.... I knew when Katrina—I was like, Man, you know, this is it, man. We're done." The racism and poverty that the catastrophe revealed laid the groundwork for newcomer Barack Obama to ride to victory in 2008. Which is how we got Eric Holder, the attorney general who's taken a direct role in some of the federal indictments in New Orleans this summer.

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The very subject of recovery is a complicated one for New Orleans. After 9/11 New York pretty much wanted to get back to where it had been—a thriving, functioning city (albeit one with plenty of poverty and injustice). No one thought New Orleans should get back to what it had been, and the disaster became an opportunity for the city to reinvent itself in various ways. That process continues, and where it goes is anyone's guess. It still depends on the dedication of volunteers and citizens, some of whom are returning, putting their lives back together in what may be, by some intangible measures of joy and belonging, America's richest city, even if it's the poorest by others.

A disaster unfolds a little like a revolution. No one is in charge, and anything is possible. The efforts of elites, often portrayed as rescue or protection, are often geared more toward preserving the status quo or seizing power. Sometimes they win; sometimes they don't. Katrina brought many kinds of destruction and a little rebirth, including the spread of green construction projects, new community organizations and perhaps soon, thanks to the work of Thompson and others, some long overdue justice for police crimes. It's too soon to tell what it will all mean in a hundred years, but it's high time to start telling the real story of what happened in those terrible first days and weeks. ■

# Crossing the Line

Women on the US-Mexico border are seeking out alternatives to embattled abortion clinics.

by LAURA TILLMAN

*Brownsville, Texas*

**D**iana, a slight, 30-year-old office manager wearing a smart blouse and pencil skirt, has a tired note in her voice. In the privacy of her office, she has spent the afternoon discussing an event in her life that she previously never recounted to anyone. She is talking about her abortion. Or maybe her miscarriage. She's glad she never has to know which.

A single mother of two boys, Diana was unemployed and in the hospital when she began to suspect she was pregnant. It was December 2006, and she had missed her period for two months. Her doctor conducted a urine test, which came back negative, but when Diana still hadn't gotten her period in January, she started to panic. She knew it wasn't the right time for another baby. She wasn't working and had been suffering severe symptoms of brittle diabetes, a rare form of diabetes that requires frequent hospital visits and brings bouts of depression. She felt unstable and wasn't able to afford her medications. "I thought, If I am pregnant, I want to take something to not be pregnant," she says.

For most women in the United States, this would mean a trip to a doctor or abortion clinic. But where Diana lives, in Brownsville, Texas, just north of the border, Mexican pharmacies are only a few miles away. Items said to be abortifacients—including pills, teas and shots—are well-known to be cheap and accessible just across the bridge. Misoprostol, a pill that makes up half of the two-drug combination prescribed for medical abortions in the United States, is easy to purchase over the counter in Mexico because of its effectiveness in treating ulcers. When used alone and taken correctly, it will produce a miscar-



KAREN CALDICOTT

riage between 80 and 85 percent of the time.

Meanwhile, the closest abortion clinic, in Harlingen, is some thirty miles away. That might not sound like much, but without a car it is difficult to make the trip discreetly. This was one of several reasons Diana didn't want to go to the clinic. It was also prohibitively expensive: potentially more than \$900, because she was already a few months into her pregnancy. Also, she was scared that the doctor wouldn't want to operate because of her diabetes. Finally, Diana had been there once before to escort a friend. The whole

time she'd felt like she was being judged by the strangers around her; she imagined their eyes on her as she sat waiting.

Widespread opposition to abortion in the Rio Grande Valley may not be obvious at first: it is not discussed in polite conversation. But spend a little time here and the bumper stickers that cry out from cars, the messages that dot billboards on the expressway and the rhetoric inside many churches resoundingly confirm an antiabortion message. There are accessible clinics, and the procedure is legal. But within many women's homes, their communities, their churches and their minds, a trip to the abortion clinic amounts to a damnable transgression. In fact, abortion is so stigmatized, many women don't even realize it is legal. Terri Lievanos, who worked for years as an education coordinator for Planned Parenthood of Brownsville, says that this is true even among women born in the United States: "They come in here and say, 'Wait a second, abortion is legal?' They've only heard it discussed in a negative way."

For Diana, who was born in Mexico and raised in a deeply Catholic household, the prospect of being seen at a clinic was more emotionally taxing than the risk of taking a mystery drug and enduring the consequences at home by herself. A friend told her that he knew where to buy an abortion pill—most likely Misoprostol, although Diana says she doesn't know its name or what he paid—and drove across the border to pick it up for her.

*Laura Tillman is a freelance journalist and photographer who was a staff reporter for the Brownsville Herald from 2007 to 2010. This article was reported in collaboration with the Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute.*

Diana took the drugs, two pills over two days, with no medical guidance. Nothing happened for nearly two weeks. Then she began to bleed. The intense bleeding lasted four days, and she had severe cramps. On the fourth day she began to have painful contractions. A small sac dropped into her toilet. "It wasn't moving, so I flushed it. I didn't know what to do. I was scared that if I looked at it, I'd be traumatized for life." Diana called her mother and her sister the next day and told them she'd had a miscarriage. She didn't mention the pills. They urged her to go to the hospital. "The doctor looked at me, and I was fine," Diana says. "I told them it was a miscarriage. I didn't tell [them] about the pills."

She doesn't tell people she had an abortion, she says, because she never went to a clinic. "When people ask me if I had a miscarriage, I'll tell them yes," Diana says. "I didn't actually go get the abortion. I don't know if it's the pill that actually caused the abortion." As far as Diana is concerned, it's possible the miscarriage was caused by the drugs. It's also possible that it wasn't.

**D**iana is one of many women along the US-Mexico border who appear to be seeking out drugs like Misoprostol as an alternative to an abortion clinic. Whether this represents a broader trend is difficult to say, given the lack of data and the underground nature of self-induced abortions. But it is hardly a new phenomenon. Even before abortion politics roiled the debate over healthcare reform and the 2009 murder of Dr. George Tiller, many women in the Rio Grande Valley were looking to have abortions in private, in order to escape the scrutiny of their neighbors and the fear of being attacked publicly. It is far easier to be able to say "miscarriage" in a city like Brownsville than it is to admit to an abortion. To protect herself, Diana asked that only her first name be used in this article.

Dr. Lester Minto works at the abortion clinic in Harlingen, a nondescript, out-of-the-way building. He says that some clients first find out about the facility when they are taken there by church groups to protest. "I wear a bulletproof vest to work," Minto says. "If the patient sees me that way, how does the patient feel?"

Minto estimates that some 20 percent of his patients have tried Misoprostol before coming to him. "That tells me there are many more who are using it who don't need to come to me." Finances are a major factor. "It's something you can try for a small amount of money," he says. In Texas, abortion care is not covered by Medicaid except in cases of rape, incest and life endangerment—and even in those cases the costs are reimbursed less than half the time. This means that a woman like Diana, without private insurance, could pay anywhere from \$450 to more than \$900, compared with \$87 to \$167 for a bottle of Misoprostol in a Mexican pharmacy. "But deeper than that," he adds, echoing Diana's sentiments, "I am the abortionist. They come to me for an abortion. If I don't touch them, maybe it wasn't really an abortion."

At Whole Woman's Health, an abortion clinic in nearby McAllen, executive director Andrea Ferrigno tries to provide an antidote to the antichoice billboards and fake cemetery erected by antiabortion activists just beyond the clinic's property. She papers the walls with inspirational quotes, displays stacks of pamphlets about courageous women in history and plays movies on a

TV up front to help clients relax. But she knows that even with these measures, some women will still be undone by social pressure. "Women are intimidated; they're stressed," says Ferrigno. "We need to be protected, but we also want to be visible. I want women to walk out of here with their heads held high." This is an uphill battle. "What we're dealing with now is thirty-five years of women being very publicly shamed by antichoice protesters," says Gloria Feldt, former president of Planned Parenthood. "Underground abortion is one of the consequences."

Diana moved to Brownsville at 4, but her parents maintained strong ties to their home country. They never discussed sex with her. "It was implied that you wouldn't have sex until marriage," she says. "It was still a taboo subject." Jackie Christensen, a Brownsville teacher who taught high school health classes for more than two decades, says this is typical. "I would always start the class by asking if the students had ever talked with their parents about sex," she says. "I'd be lucky if one or two raised their hands." It wasn't until Planned Parenthood came to Diana's high school to give a presentation about sex and contraception that Diana became informed on the subject. These days, Planned Parenthood is no longer permitted to make such presentations in the district, and contraception is prohibited in the classroom. Christensen says she tried to fill in the gaps for her students but that many health teachers felt too uncomfortable. "A lot of health teachers didn't want to teach that topic," she says. "They wouldn't go into detail." Stories of underground abortions were so common that she took to warning against them during health class. "I'd tell my students, 'If you do things your own way, there could be damage to the uterus,'" she says.

The familiar history of botched abortions has made Misoprostol increasingly popular among women seeking out a less dangerous private alternative to abortion, particularly in places where abortion is illegal. The Planned Parenthood in Brownsville reports visits by women who have used syringes, taken cocktails of prescription drugs, doused with battery acid and beaten themselves in the abdomen to attempt abortion. "These pills are beginning to revolutionize abortion around the world, especially in poor countries," *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof wrote this summer, noting that the drug would be difficult to ban because of its other uses, which include stopping postpartum hemorrhages. Rebecca Gomperts, founder of the organization Women on Waves, which provides reproductive health services around the world, agrees. "It creates autonomy," she says. "The fact that [women] can just take a medication is huge, because they don't have to depend on someone else doing something to their bodies."

Gomperts believes that using Misoprostol can actually be preferable to going to a clinic, particularly if a woman has access to information on how to use it correctly, knows how long she has been pregnant and can get medical help if something goes wrong. Still, there are significant risks: if used incorrectly, Misoprostol can cause the uterus to rupture and bring about internal bleeding. "In one of the most extreme cases, the girl took over a hundred pills," Dr. Minto, of the Harlingen clinic, says. "It's amazing that she survived." Diana, too, was lucky. She now knows that taking the pills that far into her pregnancy was dangerous. She could have caused her child to have birth defects,

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St. Augustine warned that it is dangerous for religious people to ignore science: "Many non-Christians are well versed in natural knowledge, so they can detect vast ignorance in such a Christian and laugh it to scorn."

On the other hand, Sir Isaac Newton freely discusses the attributes and activities of God in *Principia Mathematica*, which sets forth his theory of gravity and laws of motion.

These examples represent the traditional relationship of science and religion that is too often obscured by the divisive, hot-headed rhetoric and the gross oversimplifications we often see in today's headlines. Long before the shouting and the sloganeering, scientists and theologians have pursued a unity of truth, and most theologians have agreed with the advice of Galileo's colleague, Cardinal Baronio, that the Bible "tells us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go."

Once we understand this, we have a new perspective on many present-day controversies. The current antievolution furor, for example, centers on the fixation that Genesis 1 should be taken literally, an issue that had been resolved by theologians long ago. Professor Principe deems it "astonishingly trivial," and shows how

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Dr. Lawrence M. Principe is Professor of the History of Science and Technology, and Professor of Chemistry at Johns Hopkins University. He received a Ph.D. in Organic Chemistry from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in the History of Science from Johns Hopkins University. He has won several Johns Hopkins teaching awards and the 2004 Francis Bacon Prize from the California Institute of Technology.

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had the drug not worked and had she carried to term. Or the pills could have caused her to hemorrhage or prevented her from having children in the future. That, she says, scares her.

**A** number of recent studies looking at self-induced abortions in the United States suggest that women across the country continue to seek out alternatives to clinics that are embattled, increasingly costly and geographically inaccessible. Dr. Dan Grossman, of Ibis Reproductive Health, whose research on the topic has focused on various US cities as well as the Rio Grande Valley, says the group of women attempting self-induced abortion is fairly diverse. An ongoing study by the Guttmacher Institute corroborates this: 79 percent of women who tried self-induced abortion were from the United States, and that number was spread across twenty states.

"I think our findings suggest that there are still significant barriers to abortion care in the United States," Grossman says. "Those include the high cost of abortion care—and in most states Medicaid cannot be used to cover abortion care." Low-income women feel these barriers more acutely. Three-fourths of women who have an abortion say that, like Diana, they cannot afford a child, according to the Guttmacher Institute. Forty-two percent of women having abortions are below the federal poverty line.

Brownsville, located in one of the poorest counties in the country, illustrates this economic divide. Driving through one of the new subdivisions, you could easily assume the city is middle-class. The adobe and brick homes look alike, with tall palm trees punctuating the wide lawns. Lakes where ibises, anhingas

and ducks dive for food provide a scenic backdrop for the city's wealthier families. But Brownsville's poor neighborhoods resemble those across the snaking Rio Grande and the eighteen-foot border fence along its northern bank. Houses here are cobbled together from cheap wood and scrap metal, dogs run wild and the smell of sewage wafts through the streets. There is no medical school or law school for hundreds of miles, and while many soldiers in the military come from this area, there's no veterans' hospital either. As in many poor areas in the United States, health services are often acquired at the emergency room, with little preventive medicine being sought. Here, women don't often have a consistent relationship with a physician they trust. Instead, care is delivered at times of emergency. In such an environment, a mission like Ferrigno's at Whole Woman's Health remains incredibly challenging. Without better healthcare education, affordable coverage and information for women about their reproductive rights, risky, self-induced abortions will continue. A drug like Misoprostol may be proving to be a safer alternative, but it is no substitute for reproductive care that happens out in the open, with the expertise of a medical professional.

For her part, Diana understands this. Now that time has passed, she has reflected on her experience. She knows she took a risk and admits she would have had regrets had things turned out differently. But when asked what she would tell another woman who is seeking an abortion and weighing her options, Diana takes a moment to reply. "Logically, you should go to a clinic," she says. "If you have the money, you should. It's safer. But the whole thing of being in a clinic like that is, it traumatizes people too. Really, the more private thing and the more convenient thing to do would be to just take the pill." ■

# Doing Green Jobs Right

Activists in Boston are shaping energy policy through pioneering community-labor alliances.

by **AMY B. DEAN**

**P**hyllis Evans never gave much thought to the national debate over green jobs. As a mother of two, former substitute teacher and homeowner in Dorchester, Massachusetts, Evans was active with New England United for Justice, which is best known for organizing around housing and economic justice. But when her group joined the Green Justice Coalition and began partnering with the Boston Climate Action Network, she suddenly found herself educating members of her community on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, energy



KAREN CALDICOTT

efficiency and low-carbon diets. These concepts had been foreign to her, yet Evans was now giving workshops on them to other low- and moderate-income residents. "We teach them how to weatherize their homes, caulk windows and different things they can do to cut down on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions," she explains. "And we tell them different ways it will cut down on their utility bills."

While there is much discussion of the green economy nationally, few people truly understand what the buzzwords mean, and members of the Green Justice Coalition are among the very small number who are work-

ing to create energy-conscious neighborhoods in the heart of cities, inhabited by working people and people of color. "Our community is really toxic," Evans says. "We have the highest rates of a lot of illnesses related to the environment, so it's nec-

*Amy B. Dean is co-author of A New New Deal: How Regional Activism Will Reshape the American Labor Movement. She worked for two decades in the labor movement and now works developing innovative organizing strategies for social change organizations. She can be reached at amybdean.com.*

essary for us to be active. Being an African-American woman myself, I think I need to be part of the solution.”

Evans is not alone in her beliefs, and the Green Justice Coalition has gone far beyond teaching people how to save energy—to actually shaping public policy in Massachusetts. In the process, it has created a model to connect the struggle for environmental justice with the fight for living-wage jobs, helping to lay the groundwork for a new generation of community-labor coalitions across the country. Largely below the radar, a growing number of activists are scoring important victories at the regional level through similar tactics, combining serious coalition building, astute policy research and aggressive political action, and paving the way for a new New Deal in America.

In October 2009, the Green Justice Coalition scored an important victory by getting environmental justice language inserted into Massachusetts’s new, \$1.4 billion energy efficiency plan, one of the first comprehensive plans in the nation. The plan takes steps to significantly reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. But compared to similar initiatives in other states, the provisions pushed by activists in Massachusetts will ensure that the plan has a far more direct impact on residents’ lives. There will be a financing plan to make energy-saving home improvements more affordable. Many of the 23,300 jobs to be generated by the plan will go to contractors who pay decent wages and meet “high road” employment standards. Finally, four pilot programs across the state will test a radically new outreach model by going door to door and mobilizing low- and moderate-income families in building greener neighborhoods.

These innovations already have national significance. The Obama administration’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act includes more than \$30 billion for green construction—and this one-time stimulus is just a fraction of the money that state and federal agencies will spend to increase energy efficiency and reduce carbon consumption in the coming years. For social movements, such investments are only the beginning; their real mission will be to seize the opportunities made available in order to build campaigns with a series of escalating demands. In Boston, activists are committed to using the state program to score a triple win: delivering a blow to global warming, creating jobs needed to fuel economic recovery and addressing the exclusion of racially and economically marginalized communities from green development. The Green Justice Coalition has built momentum around each of these goals.

As the coalition began mobilizing, researchers worked to decipher the obscure inner workings of bodies like the state Energy Efficiency Advisory Council (EEAC). They were surprised to discover that although everyone in the state who paid an electricity bill contributed monthly to a program that gave incentives to homeowners to increase energy efficiency, only the wealthiest households were benefiting from the subsidies. Few residents of less-affluent communities could afford the thousands of dollars needed to green their homes in order to qualify for the initiative.

“Lower-income families are paying the most into the

system because our homes are the oldest and draftiest,” says Kellie Page, a leader of the Alliance to Develop Power in Springfield, Massachusetts. “But we don’t have the hundreds or thousands of dollars it takes to benefit from it. Plus, the program isn’t well advertised in our communities. It’s higher-income communities that end up getting their homes weatherized and their bills reduced.”

The activists set out to demand that the state’s new energy efficiency plan include a financing mechanism that would allow for broader access. Coalition members became a vocal presence at EEAC sessions. “The meetings had been dense, long, difficult to follow and already in progress,” says Khalida Smalls, organizing director of Alternatives for Community and Environment in Roxbury, Massachusetts. “So they really got a jolt when we organized over 100 members of our organizations to come and sit in and testify. They’d never seen anything like that happen.”

On the labor front, the Boston campaigners realized that for all the talk about how green jobs would transform the economy, few people were asking what such jobs would look

While there is much discussion of the green economy nationally, few people truly understand what the buzzwords mean.

like. The coalition’s research showed that wages in home weatherization were far below prevailing standards for the building trades. At the bottom of the spectrum, workers made just \$11.26 per hour. Moreover, many low-end employers avoided payment for workers’ compensation, health insurance or Social Security by improperly classifying their workers as independent contractors.

To address this, the Green Justice Coalition pushed for living wages of at least \$18 per hour, plus benefits, for weatherization jobs. The group also promoted “first source” hiring to give residents of communities where projects were taking place priority for employment opportunities. In the end, the coalition won provisions in the state plan that launch pilot programs through which hundreds of homes needing weatherization will be bundled into one contract. Contractors who meet high-road standards will then be able to compete for these larger contracts.

Weatherization of individual homes is typically done by nonunion contractors, who often employ immigrant day laborers. Even under the state plan, the work will not be assigned to workers in the traditional building trades. However, those hired under the plan’s pilot programs will become union members. In this way, the Green Justice Coalition has provided a means for the labor movement to reach out to immigrant workers and nontraditional employees who would ordinarily be ignored or derided because they fall outside the mainstream of the construction industry.

The Green Justice Coalition did not spring up as a short-term effort to capitalize on the push for energy efficiency. Rather, it was the product of long-term planning by Community Labor

United (CLU). Founded in 2004 by the Greater Boston Labor Council, allied unions and community groups like the Chinese Progressive Association and City Life/Vida Urbana, CLU helps the labor movement go beyond bargaining over wages and benefits paid by specific employers to involvement in broader issues like promoting good schools and affordable housing for all working people.

Modeled on similarly successful community-labor organizations in San Jose and Los Angeles, CLU is an example of an innovative new breed of “think-and-act tanks” geared toward building power at the regional level. These organizations have proven vital over the past ten years in securing living-wage victories and community benefit agreements around the country—ensuring that when businesses receive tax breaks, zoning exemptions or other public support for their enterprises, the community at large sees a return on its investment. Influencing how public money for green jobs will be spent represents a new frontier in this work.

**T**he Boston-area drive illustrates three components shared by campaigns of this emerging model for regional power building: deep coalitions, policy research and political action. The first forms an essential base—unions create deeper alliances with community partners than are typically produced by single-issue initiatives. CLU demonstrated a commitment to this idea when it founded the Green Justice Coalition in December 2008. Rather than first addressing its union base, it put the perspectives of community allies at the core of the campaign. CLU co-director Lisa Clauson explains, “We really looked at the issue from an environmental justice perspective. The community organizations in the coalition created a well-defined focus on racial and economic justice. That came first. Then we were able to pull in environmental groups with the climate element. And because there was a jobs component, we were able to bring in the unions as well.”

Clauson’s goal was not only to present a unified front in the green jobs debate but also to build a durable foundation for future alliances. “We spent a lot of time within our coalition steering committee meetings having people spell out what their self-interests were, making sure people really understood where organizations were coming to the table from,” she says.

As a second element of regional power building, labor coalitions use the research capabilities and public policy savvy of nonprofits like CLU to enter broader economic debates, reframing discussions on the regional economy—and green development—in terms of how well it is meeting the needs of working people. In the case of the Green Justice Coalition, member organizations surveyed low- and middle-income communities to determine their weatherization needs, and the diverse local knowledge provided by coalition partners helped to shape the demands of the campaign. Activists argued that the advances of a low-carbon economy must be widely shared if they are to be meaningful.

Labor and environmental interests have not always coincided. Energy efficiency program consultants and directors have told Green Justice Coalition members that they can weatherize more homes by containing labor costs—in other words, holding

down wages. A “low road” push based on such reasoning might have fractured the Green Justice Coalition’s campaign. But CLU’s careful coalition building helped to prevent this. “There was certainly a possibility for the utility companies to pick off certain of our environmental partners, to the detriment of what we were organizing around,” says Clauson. “That didn’t happen, because groups in the coalition, like Clean Water Action, were key bridges between the environmental sector and our community and labor partners. They really had a commitment to the broader focus of the campaign.”

To successfully advocate for high-road jobs, CLU and its partners built relationships with public administrators sympathetic to their aims. Their efforts have reflected a third important element of regional power building: in cities where unions have embraced the strategy, labor flexes its political muscle in a new way. Central labor councils move away from merely supporting “lesser of two evils” candidates when elections come around and hoping that officials act in the movement’s interest once elected. Rather, they use their influence to create allies within the system who can work with grassroots advocates on an ongoing basis.

“The inside–outside strategy was very powerful here—to be building relationships with decision-makers and people in on the restructuring of energy efficiency in Massachusetts at the same time that we’re pressuring them from the outside,” says Juan Leyton, director of Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts. “When people are looking for environmental and economic solutions together, and when you’re dealing with a process that’s as complicated as this one, it would be very difficult to do this just pushing from the outside.”

Nationwide, other coalitions are learning similar lessons. In the South, traditionally considered hostile to unions and progressives, the Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council and a think-and-act tank called Georgia STAND-UP came together in 2005 to ensure that the concerns of labor and low-income communities were included in a plan to build a commuter and public park “green belt” around Atlanta. More recently, the national organization Green for All, under the leadership of former labor leader Phaedra Ellis-Lamkins, has brought a regional-power-building mindset to bear in organizing green jobs and energy efficiency initiatives in places like New Mexico, Portland and Seattle.

Today, even as the Boston activists seek to build on their successes and ensure that the state energy efficiency plan is implemented with environmental justice goals at the fore, they are envisioning future campaigns, from waste management to water quality. The labor movement’s involvement in far-reaching community partnerships won’t eliminate the need to organize specific workplaces and negotiate good contracts. But building regional power and reaching out to a wide range of allies will allow unions to re-envision the interests of their members. As Clauson says, “You see that the constructs separating people—you’re either a worker, or you’re a community member, or you’re an environmentalist—these are artificial.” Khalida Smalls adds, “Our members are all of these. If we can reach the level of integration that these people are experiencing every day in their own lives, we’ve found a very powerful organizing model.” ■

# Obama Takes a Crack at Drug Reform

A new law narrows the gap in cocaine sentencing and signals a broad realignment of priorities.

by **ETHAN NADELMANN**

**F**or those of us who fought long and hard to reform the notorious 100-to-one crack/powder cocaine disparity in federal law, the Fair Sentencing Act, signed by President Obama on August 3, is at once a historic victory and a major disappointment. It's both too little, too late and a big step forward.

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, which punished the sale of five grams of crack cocaine the same as 500 grams of powder cocaine, reflected the bipartisan drug war hysteria of the day and was approved with virtually no consideration of scientific evidence or the fiscal and human consequences. The argument for reform has always been twofold: sending someone to federal prison for five years for selling the equivalent of a few sugar packets of cocaine is unreasonably harsh, and it disproportionately affects minorities (almost 80 percent of those sentenced are African-Americans, even though most users and sellers of crack are not black).

The new law increases the amount of crack cocaine that can result in a five-year sentence to twenty-eight grams (i.e., an ounce), thereby reducing the crack/powder ratio to eighteen to one. It also eliminates the five-year mandatory minimum sentence for simple possession (without intent to distribute) of crack cocaine, thereby marking the first time since 1970 that Congress has repealed a mandatory minimum sentence.

What is the broader significance of the new law?

First, it's one more indication that Obama is making good on his commitment to roll back the drug war. Few reformers, including myself, would have bet that Obama would deliver—in fair measure, and within eighteen months—on all three of the pledges he made while running for president. He said he'd reverse the government's antagonism to state medical marijuana laws—and he did, with the Justice Department announcing last fall that it would essentially defer to local authorities in determining whether medical marijuana facilities were operating legally. He also said he'd support ending the ban on federal funding for needle exchange programs to reduce HIV/AIDS—and he did.

And he said he'd push to repeal the crack/powder disparity—which he did. That commitment appeared on the White House website within twenty-four hours of his inauguration. Attorney General Eric Holder described it as a personal priority and a legacy issue for him. White House and Justice Department officials joined with Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) members and other top legislators to try to eliminate the disparity—and then to achieve the best possible compromise.



KAREN CALDWELL

To be sure, the Obama administration has been disappointing on other aspects of drug policy. Law enforcement and futile interdiction programs make up the large majority of drug war expenditures, as they have since the Reagan era. Politics continues to trump science, notably in blocking heroin maintenance, supervised injection facilities and other harm-reduction innovations that have proved highly successful abroad. And Obama's drug czar, Gil Kerlikowske, refuses to acknowledge any merit to the arguments for reforming marijuana policy. There's plenty of work left, but at least

Obama made good on his specific commitments.

The victory also showed that traditional civil rights leaders are finally beginning to prioritize criminal justice reform. Black support for the late-'80s drug war helped legitimize the policies that led to the incarceration of millions of young African-Americans. The dawning realization of what they had wrought led the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Representative Charlie Rangel and then-SCLC president Joseph Lowery to start calling for reform of the crack/powder disparity in the early 1990s—but it never became a priority for them, the NAACP, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights or the CBC. The key advocates for the past two decades have been organizations committed to broader drug and sentencing reform—the ACLU, the Open Society Policy Center, the Sentencing Project, Families Against Mandatory Minimums and my organization, the Drug Policy Alliance.

Some would argue that sentencing reform is still a low priority for most civil rights organizations, but at least African-American leaders are beginning to own the issue. CBC members on the House Judiciary Committee—including Bobby Scott, Sheila Jackson Lee, Maxine Waters, Mel Watt and chair John Conyers—have pushed hard to repeal not just the crack/powder disparity but also mandatory minimum sentencing more generally. NAACP president Ben Jealous has described criminal justice reform as his top priority. And the Leadership Conference has at last stepped up to the plate.

Change is clearly afoot. Black legislators are often at the forefront of sentencing and other drug policy reform efforts in state capitals. Michelle Alexander's powerful new book, *The New Jim Crow*, in which she calls out civil rights organizations for failing to grasp that the drug war is accomplishing what Jim Crow once did, is stirring up much-needed debate. And the endorsement of California's marijuana legalization initiative, Proposition 19, by both Alice Huffman, the influential head of the California NAACP, and the National Black Police Association proves that courageous leadership is possible.

Perhaps most surprising was the apparent ease with which the crack/powder reform gained bipartisan support. Dick Durbin

*Ethan Nadelmann is the founder and executive director of the Drug Policy Alliance.*

may have provided the key leadership in the Senate, where the bill passed by unanimous consent, but the reform would have died without help from Republicans like Jeff Sessions, Orrin Hatch and Lindsey Graham. Ditto in the House, where support from the libertarian Ron Paul and his Republican colleagues James Sensenbrenner and Dan Lungren, both longtime proponents of the drug war, trumped the opposition of Lamar Smith, the ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee.

There's no telling what personal, political or philosophical considerations motivated these Republicans to abandon their party's obstructionist playbook. Hatch and others had advocated for clemency for a few victims of the harsh mandatory minimum laws. The law's costs and gross racial disproportionality may have offended core principles. Advocates in Congress and outside may have been persuasive. And certainly a surprising array of conservatives joined the call for reform, including Grover Norquist, the libertarian director of Americans for Tax Reform; Ward Connerly, the influential African-American opponent of affirmative action; and David Keene, chair of the American Conservative Union, which hosts the annual Conservative Political Action Conference. Also influential was Pat Nolan, the formerly incarcerated Republican state legislator from California, who spearheaded the campaign by Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship and its criminal justice reform arm, Justice Fellowship, to sensitize evangelicals and other conservatives to the injustices of the law.

This outbreak of bipartisanship is unlikely to extend to other areas of drug policy and criminal justice reform. Indeed, Senator

Tom Coburn, who provided crucial support on the crack/powder bill, is the principal obstacle to Jim Webb's proposal to create an independent commission on criminal justice policy. But the Republicans' support represents a tacit acknowledgment that the drug war has gone a bit overboard and that a brief moratorium on "tough on crime" rhetoric is warranted. Whether it provides a precedent for future cooperation remains to be seen.

So what's next on the agenda? The immediate priority is to make the crack/powder reform retroactive so that those already serving harsh sentences will be treated the same as those sentenced in the future. The second priority will likely be broader reform of mandatory minimum drug laws.

The third priority, I would argue, has to be national reform of marijuana prohibition laws. Arrests for marijuana possession, typically of tiny amounts, account for 44 percent of drug arrests nationwide and disproportionately affect African-Americans. Few are being sentenced to long prison terms, but most are acquiring criminal records that will handicap them for life. Forty percent of Americans, possibly more, now believe that marijuana should be legally regulated and taxed. (The same cannot be said of most other illicit drugs.) If California voters approve Prop 19 in November, the country will quickly find itself in the midst of an intense debate on marijuana policy. But even if they don't, the issue will continue to pop up on ballot initiatives and in state legislatures and Congress. As my colleague Jasmine Tyler said regarding the next frontier of drug policy reform and racial justice, "It's time to make marijuana 'the new crack.'" ■

## Letters

(continued from page 2)

ferred energy corporation. I think it is safe to assume that Klein drives a car and uses a computer. These are the issues surrounding this disaster—everyday people consuming everyday petroleum.

The gulf will not be made "right," and people will not cease, until they are forced to. The issue is not cultural philosophy but rampant irresponsibility by people (probably including you, dear reader).

JIAN NAJAC

BOSTON

Naomi Klein generalizes, even psychologizes, the BP disaster, suggesting that the problem is that we think we can manipulate nature. Who's "we"? Humans? Americans? Westerners? However imperfect or uninformed, most people don't seek to recklessly strip the earth of its resources without regard for the consequences: *industries* do that. And they don't act that way out of hubris; they do it to maximize profits within a frenzied capitalist system uninterested in human or nonhuman well-being. After all, there's no science to ignoring your own employees' warnings, haphazardly dumping toxic dis-

persants or obscuring better estimates of the leak rate. The problem is simpler, and much more vulgar.

CARL MARTIN

### 'Artsy-Fartsy Francophone' Flicks

FOREST, ILL.

Emily Witt's June 7 "Imperfect Cinemas" is the closest thing I have read to what I experience as the "African identity." Witt gets the fact that those artsy-fartsy Francophone movies Westerners praise for being so "auteur" and "revolutionary" have no appeal to common members of African society. Your explorations, Mr. African Indie Film Director, of the deep-seated neocolonialism in the psyche of the "African" through your dripping faucet imagery may have been praised from Cannes to Sundance, but, I can assure you, your layman Ghanaian or Gambian isn't interested. We want to see someone's marriage being wrecked by an evil mother-in-law, the "big oga's" daughter finding out she's been impregnated by the ruffian from across the street or at

least the bush villager finally getting his chance to chase the American Dream.

We may not be living up to Kwame Nkrumah's dreams of Africans maximizing their intellectual potential, but what society nowadays does? With America and Britain still in the throes of the "reality" TV revolution—ardently consuming such classics as *Toddlers & Tiaras* (ironically, on The Learning Channel) and the fist-pumping king of them all, *Jersey Shore*—we can hardly adjudicate these as intellectual prowess at its finest. When was the last time even I, a college-educated young woman, decided to skip my weekly serving of *The Bachelor* for a hearty helping of *Masterpiece Theatre*? I would say, never.

It's a sad situation we find ourselves in globally, but that's something we can agree on: it's a global phenomenon. What we do to stop this and who we blame is, of course, another matter. I simply stand to commend Witt on her ability to look past her own interpretations of what the African perspective should be to write about what Africans themselves have shaped as their viewpoint of the world.

WILHEMINA HAYFORD

# Books & the Arts.

## No Name or Too Many?

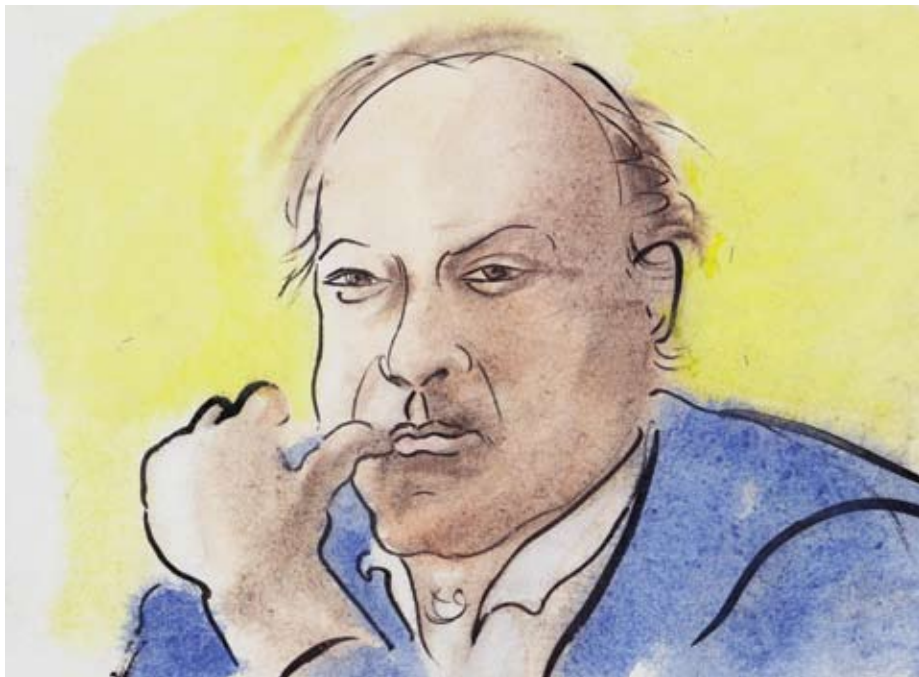
by WILLIAM DERESIEWICZ

**"O**ne life, one writing," Robert Lowell said. The writer's experience is all of a piece, and so too, however disparate it may seem, is the work to which it gives rise.

The personal emphasis here is typically poetic, but novelists have long shared the desire to give a higher unity to their careers, transform a succession of works into something larger and more coherent. The method selected is apt to reflect its time. In the nineteenth century—a period whose greatest inventions, it's been said, were society and history—Balzac and Zola produced vast sociographic supernovels, many volumes long, that sought to transcribe the whole of contemporary society. Hardy, defending his provincial world from metropolitan encroachment, gathered his work within an autonomous imaginative principality—a method emulated by Faulkner and García Márquez. High Modernism's self-mythologizing artist-heroes took a different tack, Proust placing his own figure at the center of a single never-ending, all-encompassing epic—the self expanding to fill the work, the work expanding to fill the career—with Joyce and Musil doing roughly likewise.

Different unifying strategies appear today. The autobiographical persona that runs like a spine through Philip Roth's corpus represents a multiplication and refraction of the authorial image that is perfectly in tune with our culture of mediated self-exposure. David Mitchell, one of British fiction's brightest stars, forges his links surreptitiously, characters from one novel showing up, as if by chance, in the margins of others—a strategy that mimics the fortuitous, far-flung connections of a globalizing age.

And then there is Javier Marías, the acclaimed Spanish novelist: annual Nobel speculation, 5 million books in print, high praise from Pamuk, Sebald and Coetzee. As his *oeuvre* has lengthened—and in particular, with the gradual publication of his magnum opus, the three-volume *Your Face Tomorrow*—its coherence has gathered only slowly and in retrospect. He seems to be unearthing it



ADRIAN BELLESGUARD

himself, as he goes along, and to be holding it open for constant revision. It is a unity, like Proust's, that rests on the presence of an authorial self, but a self that, unlike Proust's (or Joyce's, or Roth's), is also only retrospective and provisional. Proust begins his work from a single point and expands it ever outward; Marías has started from different places and seems gradually to have found them leading toward a common intersection. Proust builds his work around that stable, single self; Marías starts with the work and seems to stumble upon the fact that a self has been in there all along. It is a self that speaks to our present condition of centerless mobility in ways that can more easily be sensed than understood: a self of borrowed language and uncertain voice, of rumors and dreams, of no name or too many names, a self dislocated and lost in translation, distilled from the air and deliquescing in our hands.

**F**or Marías, born in 1951, dislocation came early and translation followed as a consequence. His father, a prominent philosopher long banned from teaching in Spanish universities because of his opposition to Franco, took a temporary

### Your Face Tomorrow

*Volume One: Fever and Spear.*

By Javier Marías.

Translated by Margaret Jull Costa.

New Directions. 387 pp. \$24.95.

### Your Face Tomorrow

*Volume Two: Dance and Dream.*

By Javier Marías.

Translated by Margaret Jull Costa.

New Directions. 341 pp. \$24.95.

### Your Face Tomorrow

*Volume Three: Poison, Shadow and Farewell.*

By Javier Marías.

Translated by Margaret Jull Costa.

New Directions. 546 pp. \$24.95.

position at Wellesley for what turned out to be the earliest years of his son's life. English, encountered by chance, became for Marías a vocation and later a fate. A prolific translator as well as novelist, he has rendered an entire bookshelf into Spanish—works by Shakespeare, Sterne, Hardy, Kipling, Faulkner, Updike, Auden, Heaney and on and on, many of whose voices reverberate through his fiction. But in his early 30s, he also did

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William Deresiewicz is a Nation contributing writer. A Jane Austen Education will be out next year from Penguin Press.

a two-year stint at Oxford, and that's where things get really interesting.

Oxford inspired a novel, *All Souls*, about a visiting Spaniard (unnamed); his affair with Clare Bayes, a don's wife; his friendship with Cromer-Blake, secretly gay and secretly dying; and his admiration for the venerable Toby Rylands. But the main narrative is interleaved with the story of a real writer, John Gawsworth, and as if to insist on the man's existence, the book provides a couple of photos. Fact and fiction intermingling, but that was only the start. *All Souls* was promptly taken (perhaps because of the strenuous disclaimer to the contrary that prefaces the book) as a roman à clef, with various figures stepping forward to nominate themselves as originals. Knowing a good thing when he saw one, Mariás chronicled the turnabout, nine years later and with even more copious visual documentation, in *Dark Back of Time*, a "false novel" that opens by declaring that "language can't reproduce events and shouldn't attempt to," for the act of telling necessarily distorts. The book also recounts the story of its author's coronation as King of Redonda, a notional realm with a real address (Redonda is an uninhabitable island in the Lesser Antilles) that, with dignitaries like John Ashbery (Duke of Convexo) and A.S. Byatt (Duchess of Morpho Eugenia)—Mariás himself initiated the practice of ennoblement—is meant to constitute something like a Republic of Letters. Apparently the reigning king abdicated in Mariás's favor out of admiration for the latter's portrait, in *All Souls*, of the previous incumbent—who was, in fact, John Gawsworth.

Between *All Souls* and its funhouse reflection, Mariás continued to publish novels and stories in the vein, more or less, of his earlier ones, works like *A Heart So White*, his most popular and celebrated book, in which a man tracks down the secrets of his father's first marriage, or tries to, and *Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me*, which begins with the death of the woman, literally in his arms, with whom the narrator is about to commit adultery. But however various the plots, a larger coherence was taking shape, for among his many works the author drew connections in an even more uncanny way than David Mitchell. Characters themselves did not recur, but their names did: wives called Luisa (Mariás is unmarried), shady figures called Ruibérriz de Torres and Custardoy (two of the latter, in *A Heart So White*, father and son art forgers). There was surely a large element of play in these gestures, yet at the same time, it seemed, a private symbolic language was being spoken or elaborated—a kind of dream

or drama or trauma, the motions of a hidden self, being played out beyond our sight.

In the meantime, the Oxford material continued to make its claims on Mariás's imagination. *Dark Back of Time*, that book itself declared, would only be the beginning:

So much has sprung from [*All Souls*] into my life that I no longer know how many volumes I'll need to tell it all, this book won't be enough and its planned sequel may not be either, because eight years have passed since I published the novel and all of it continues to invade my days, stealing into them, and my nights, too, now more than ever.

Twelve years later, we can begin to say how many volumes Mariás would need to tell it all: at least three. From *Dark Back of Time* he launched directly into *Your Face Tomorrow*. The narrator of *All Souls* is back, and this time he's found a name, Jacques Deza. The millennium has turned, and as the story opens—he's in England once again, an older and more burdened man—his years at Oxford are much on his mind. He recalls Clare Bayes with disgust, Cromer-Blake with pity and Toby Rylands with awe. The last two are dead, and Rylands has bequeathed his place as Deza's mentor to Sir Peter Wheeler, an emeritus scholar of Spanish history.

Deza knows the two men were colleagues; what he doesn't discover until most of the way through the first volume is that they were actually brothers. Both were born Rylands, but Wheeler took their mother's maiden name in the wake of their parents' divorce. Mariás is playing a particularly complex game here, both intertextual and metafictional. The figure of Rylands, *Dark Back of Time* had told us, was based on a real person, Sir Peter Russell. But Russell's original name was Wheeler, for the exact same reason that Wheeler's was Rylands. Sir Peter Wheeler is also based on Russell—much more closely so than Rylands, in fact. A thousand pages later, at the end of the entire book, we're shown a photograph of Wheeler after he has died (as Russell did in 2006)—a picture, presumably, of Russell himself. So Rylands hands Deza off to his real-life counterpart, presented here as his fictional brother, a figure who seems to exist in both realms at once.

That's the Oxford part. But in the years between *All Souls* and the start of the new novel's action, Deza has returned to Spain, gotten married (to a woman named Luisa, of course), fathered two children and—this is why he's back in England—separated from his wife. While *All Souls* had adumbrated some of this material (the wife, the

first child), large areas of shadow continue to lie on Deza's story. We never learn very much about what he did for all these years, or how he managed to estrange his wife. But when he returns to Madrid, late in the novel, to see what's become of the home he has left, he finds that she has taken up with none other than Custardoy the Younger, the art forger, from *A Heart So White*.

In other words, the novel bridges the two halves of Mariás's imagination, the English half and the Spanish half, writes Oxford and Luisa/Custardoy into a single narrative. Indeed, the movement from one side to the other—call it translation or translocation—becomes a governing principle. Deza's name is Jacques—except when it is not. Sometimes it is Jacobo, or Jaime, or Jack. It depends where he is, and who's talking to him, and in what language. The novel shuttles not only between England and Spain, Spanish Oxonians and English Hispanists, but also between English and Spanish; it seems at times to be written in both languages at once and certainly makes the traffic between the two a constant point of reflection. To take one charged and recurrent example:

He was lucky—in a way—that there is no one-word English equivalent for the unequivocal '*patria*' of my own language (or only highly recondite, theoretical ones): the word he had used, 'country,' means different things depending on the context, but is less emotive and less pompous and should almost always be translated as '*país*.'

That we in this *país* are likely to read the novel in English only adds another layer of complexity. What marvels the great translator Margaret Jull Costa must have had to perform to replot these transpositions in an inconspicuous way I do not know, but with the story's abundance of (implicitly) English dialogue, the novel's bilingualism places us in the curious position of being often more privileged, in a sense, than its original audience.

**A**s the narrative opens, Wheeler recruits Deza for a strange and secretive intelligence group that, the protagonist eventually learns, has been in operation since the War. Headed at present by a man named Tupra, the group is simply asked to observe people—in interviews or on videotape—and analyze their character. What kind of people? Anyone the government (or at least Tupra, who seems to have motives of his own) is interested in: foreign operatives, organized criminals, politicians and pop stars, even members of the royal

# 50 WAYS TO READ THE NATION

#29



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#8



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#41



#10

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#37

You can



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#32 You can read it while you cook



#11 On your iPad or your Nook

#7



#14

You can read



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family. But “analysis” is not the word that Deza puts on their activities. Instead, he tells us, his job is to “interpret” people, to “translate” them—a literary rather than a scientific task. Tupra wants to know not only who these people are but what they might be capable of: what their face might be tomorrow. Deza and his colleagues—all of whom have been selected for their special powers of insight, their rare ability, as Wheeler puts it, to resist the temptation to deny what’s right in front of our eyes—are asked, in effect, to produce scenarios. Could this man ever kill? Under what circumstances? How? Uncertainty is not tolerated; “perhaps” earns Tupra’s contempt. And so, at first quite guiltily but quickly forgetting his guilt, Deza learns to spin his stories with an air of perfect confidence, claiming to understand complete strangers better than they know themselves.

This is all, needless to say, an inventive if ostentatiously contrived extended metaphor for the novelistic act. The writer as reader of character, yes, but also as fabulator, bluffer, fraud. “Translate” is apt, for translation, too, is a kind of fraudulence or forgery, a copy that claims to stand for the original—just like the work that Custardoy produces. Deza himself is obsessed with authenticity, specifically, like any true Anglophile, with the question of who is authentically English. Wheeler and Rylands are “bogus Englishmen” because they were born in New Zealand. As for Tupra—who goes under any number of aliases, a name-shifter like Wheeler or Deza himself—who knows, with a moniker like that, where he came from?

It’s a matter, at bottom, of character. What does it mean to be authentically yourself? Who are the people in our lives—who are they really—and who are we ourselves? Unbeknown to Mariás at the time he wrote *All Souls*—and this may have been the revelation that hurt him into the new novel—the gentle and benevolent Sir Peter Russell turned out to have led a very different life before his career at Oxford, working overseas for MI6, and doing who knows what bloody deeds, during the War. Tupra likes to tease Deza by calling him Iago, the classical form of his name, but after learning more about his own capacity for violence than he ever wanted to know, the protagonist adopts that famous villain’s famous line: “I am not what I am.”

The novelist as forger, but also as outsider. (Two related ideas, for the foreigner, the expatriate, is always, with respect to his adopted culture, an imposter.) Deza is frequently asked to observe the group’s interviews from behind a two-way mirror in a little booth

whose benches run, awkwardly enough, perpendicular to the opening, “with the inevitable feeling that one was looking out of a train window.” The effect is standard Mariás: his narrators are almost always watchers, observing life rather than participating in it. Deza himself is an outsider, a watcher, at least four times over: at work, in England, in the family from which he has been exiled (and which he thinks about constantly) and even in his neighborhood. He lives alone, sees almost no one and passes his time staring out the window at a neighbor across the square, a man who spends his evenings dancing around his apartment in joyful absorption—a recurrent figure for everything that Deza (and implicitly the novelist) is not.

While the protagonist quotes Iago, he also quotes Prufrock: “‘Do I dare?’ and, ‘Do I dare?’” Will the man of words remain a watcher, or will he take the moral risk of entering the arena of action? If T.S. Eliot is here, so is Cervantes, quoted with equal frequency, creator of a bookish hero who sallies forth in boots and spurs. Arms versus arts: that was the Renaissance talking point, action versus contemplation. Violence is rare in *Your Face Tomorrow*, but it is sudden and brutal, and the phallic weaponry invariably employed gestures back at Don Quixote and his lance: the sword that Tupra brandishes, in the novel’s central episode, to terrify a harmless fool; the spear with which a dissolute celebrity disposes of an inconvenient lover; the iron poker Deza takes to Custardoy at the climax of the story, doing bitter business at last; even Wheeler’s walking stick, a geriatric memory of the weapons, metaphoric or otherwise, he once wielded.

**T**his tension between action and reflection, this Prufrockian withdrawal, is enacted in the very texture of the novel’s prose. Deza’s style—or Mariás’s, really, since it appears throughout his work—is one of almost endless rumination: assertions and expansions, examples and exceptions, detours, digressions, associations and allusions, a verbal accretion that hangs from every increment of event in long syntactic tendrils:

Then I heard Tupra’s commanding voice:

‘Stand clear, Jack.’ And at the same time, he grabbed my shoulder, firmly but not roughly, and drew me aside, removed me, I mean, from the doorway of that cubicle which was more like a small room, perhaps the same size as those minuscule mausoleums

in the cemetery of Os Prazeres, summarily decorated and intended to be welcoming, at once inhabited and uninhabited. ‘Stand clear, Jack’ were his words, or perhaps ‘Clear off’ or ‘Step aside’ or ‘Out of my way, Jack,’ it’s hard to remember exactly something which, subsequently, disappears into nothing because of everything else that comes after, at any rate, I understood what he meant, whatever the phrase he used, that was the sense and it was, moreover, accompanied by that gesture, his firm hand on my shoulder, which allowed itself to be pushed out of the way; viewed positively, the phrase could have been understood as ‘Step aside,’ more negatively as ‘Out of my way, Jack, clear off, don’t get involved and don’t even think about trying to stop me,’ but his tone of voice sounded more like the former, a very gentle voice given that it was issuing an order that brooked no disobedience or delay, no hesitation in its performance, no resistance or questioning or protest or even any show of horror, because it is impossible to object to or to oppose someone who has a sword in his hand and who has already raised it up in order to bring it down hard, to deal a blow, to slice through something, when that is the first time you have seen the sword and have no idea where it came from, a primitive blade, a medieval grip, a Homeric hilt, an archaic tip, the most unnecessary of weapons or the most out of keeping with the times we live in, more even than an arrow and more than a spear...

and so the sentence continues on for another page.

Deza’s retreat into reflection here is comprehensible. He’s terrified by what his boss appears about to do, and his mind spins in upon itself to spare himself the sight of it. The whole scene, which takes only a few minutes of narrative time, distends to more than forty pages, partitioned into tiny Cubist quanta of action by yards of intervening commentary. But almost all of the novel is like this, and mostly without psychological excuse. The impulse to hold life at arm’s length belongs both to Deza and his author, is both the novel’s theme and its temperament. When Deza’s neighbor, late in the story, beckons him to join the dance—an offer seconded by his two attractive partners, one of whom happens to be half-naked at the moment—the protagonist declines. The novel’s philosophical asides

do not finally interrupt the plot, which, for a work of this length, is exceedingly thin; they are the reason it exists.

There is something here at once bookish, English and European. Deza's mind revolves incessantly among a certain set of literary touchstones, which also are Mariás's: not just Cervantes and Eliot and *Othello* but also *Richard III* (the source of *Tomorrow in the Battle's* title) and *Henry IV, Part II* (the source of *Your Face Tomorrow's*). Life is glimpsed in its passage through books, a text to be pondered, expounded, annotated, interpreted. As for Mariás's Englishness—which may represent a deliberate rejection of Spanish passion or passionolatry—it makes itself felt in a kind of stiff-upper-lipism, a stoical reticence of emotional effusion or personal disclosure. The tone is set by Wheeler, with whom Deza has a series of long, courtly conversations that frame the entire book. Feelings move beneath the surface of the older man's discourse, as they do of Deza's meditations (chiefly feelings, in the latter case, about the family he thinks he's lost), but they are kept in check by a punctilious parsimony of expression.

Mariás's Europeanness is of the autumnal variety, much in evidence in recent decades, the product of a ripened civilization that feels

itself equipped for nothing but the harvest. Life has happened already, history has happened, and now there's nothing left except to talk about it. Mariás resembles Sebald, his rough contemporary, in many respects: their use of documentary materials to blur the line between fact and fiction; their engagement with themes of exile and translocation; their own relocation, imaginative and otherwise, from the continent to England; but most of all, their sense of belatedness. Deza, with his books and his memories and his otherwise empty life, seems willfully absented from the present. The threat of Custardoy, not only to his wife but to his hopes of reuniting with his wife, does fling him back, albeit briefly, to the world. But though Mariás has long been obsessed by the love triangle—aside from being a presence here, *Othello* is the major point of reference for *The Man of Feeling*, an earlier novel—Deza's most important relationships are not with sexual rivals. They are with father figures: in other words, with the past.

**W**heeler is one; Deza's own father, modeled on his author's, is another. Deza's conversations with the former are echoed by his interchanges, mostly recollected, with the latter. The topic, in both, is precisely the past:

World War II, when Wheeler holds forth; the Spanish Civil War, when the elder Deza tells his stories. Uniquely, in these passages, the protagonist's internal chatter quiets down. Like a child listening to a bedtime story, he is, for once, fully engrossed. The narrative achieves fluidity and drive. The past, incomparably richer than the present, arises as the sole arena of significant action. Wheeler, with his dark but necessary deeds, the elder Deza, with his noble suffering and principled refusal to seek a later revenge—these men have lived; these men have lives that are fit to be made into stories.

Nor is it just any past. As with Sebald—and this is the postwar European mood that Mariás both diagnoses and symptomatizes—the imagination is shadowed by the black middle of the last century. The two wars, the Spanish one and the one that followed, continue to determine the shape of the present. Deza's group was started as a way of fighting Hitler; later, in Madrid, when the protagonist is looking for a gun with which to threaten Custardoy, he remembers that the weapons of the civil war (it's virtually the only thing we learn about contemporary Spanish life) are still circulating in private hands.

If the past is Wheeler and the elder Deza, the present is Tupra, the father figure in de-

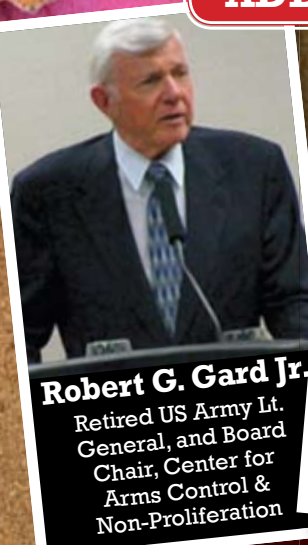
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generated form. Not only is his relationship with Deza purely instrumental; he lacks the moral stature of the older men. They ponder at length the ethical implications of the things they've seen and done. Tupra says rhetorically, "Why can't one go around beating up people and killing them?" The group, a vestige of the struggle against fascism, has become the tool of purposes that, whether public or private (Tupra has been marketing its services to paying clients), are equally unspeakable. The present is Tupra; and De la Garza, the crude buffoon he terrorizes (a cultural attaché, of all things, at the Spanish Embassy); and "Dick Dearlove," the vain, louche, murderous celebrity. (The pseudonym, bestowed by Deza, is a jab at the man who was head of MI6 during the start of the "war on terror.") The present is faithless, spineless, cynical, superficial. By the end of the novel—both Wheeler and his father have died—it is also all that Deza has.

Now all this is interesting to think about and talk about: fact and fiction, action and contemplation, the past and the present, and so on and so forth. There is one problem, however, and like the novel itself, it is not a small one. For all its intellect and erudition, and despite its occasional flashes of feeling, *Your Face Tomorrow* is an incredibly boring book. A crushingly, demoralizingly boring book. My overwhelming emotion, as I read it, was one of an immense, hopeless, enraged sadness, at what the author was putting me through. The first two volumes were largely a heavy slog from one oasis of incident or interest to the next, through deserts of Deza's interminable reflection. The final one was a death march to the finish. Mariás's

## The Pithy Serpent

everyone knows satan is just a guy  
with a lot of special efx  
a pithy serpent  
who plucks apples  
from the garden of lost trees  
I'm an ancient bystander  
whose chronology  
is less sympathetic and more cave-like  
think of me as  
an obscene gesture  
a plain ordinary obscene gesture  
in a place where the weather is nice  
and the people don't have a clue

DAVE BRINKS

meditative, melancholy, digressive style may work in his earlier books, none of which are a great deal longer than 300 pages, but *Your Face Tomorrow* is more than 1,250, for God's sake. Imagine *War and Peace* if those philosophical excursions, where Tolstoy drones on about historical process, were expanded to fill the bulk of the book.

There's nothing wrong, of course, with a reflective, analytic style. James and Proust produced exquisite versions, and Mariás is frequently and predictably compared to both. What's wrong with his style is that it doesn't go anywhere, neither forward on its own terms nor deeper into the story. Like an old woman telling her beads, Deza simply ruffles through the same ideas and images and allusions over and over and over again, often in exactly the same language. Lovers betray us, people are blind, words are dangerous, time is the only truth, etc., etc., etc. Most of his perceptions are fresh and compelling the first time we hear them. But the second? The fifth? The fifteenth? Whatever one can say about these repetitions in thematic terms—that they embody Deza's inability to escape from his obsessions, or history's to break free of the past—on the page they are utterly numbing.

Nor do Deza's meditations enhance the narrative to any real extent. Reflection in James and Proust—Strether's in *The Ambassadors*, say, or Marcel's in *In Search of Lost Time*—isn't a commentary on the story; it is essential to the story. It hugs the plot like the lining of a coat. It exposes character, develops relationships, shapes action. It gives utterance to feeling and direction to choice. It evolves, as the protagonists themselves evolve. But reflection in *Your Face Tomorrow* rarely does any of those things; it simply sits alone in its study, watching the plot go by.

**T**hat is why, despite the much-remarked length of his sentences, Mariás's prose is incomparably poorer than that of James or Proust. Their sentences are complicated because of the immense complexity of the life that they are asked to bear. In James it is a social complexity, the elaboration of conduct within a highly ordered set of codes. In Proust it is a complexity of memory, the involutions of sensual and emotional association. James's sentences are as dense with thought as a mathematical proof. Proust's ramify as lushly as a garden. But while Mariás's sentences are long, they are hardly complex at all. Their length is built on parataxis, units simply gummed together one after the other, like cars in a freight train, not hypotaxis, units arranged in complex

relationships of balance, subordination and support, like the parts of a suspension bridge. His prose is thin because the life it represents is thin—events, emotions, relationships and memories without much texture to speak of.

The heaping up of language, far from enriching Mariás's prose, often drains it of meaning altogether:

...sooner or later, everything is told, the interesting and the trivial, the private and the public, the intimate and the superfluous, what should remain hidden and what will one day inevitably be broadcast, sorrows and joys and resentments, certainties and conjectures, the imagined and the factual, persuasions and suspicions, grievances and flattery and plans for revenge, great feats and humiliations, what fills us with pride and what shames us utterly, what appeared to be a secret and what begged to remain so, the normal and the unconfessable and the horrific and the obvious, the substantial—falling in love—and the insignificant—falling in love.

With every creak of this seesaw rhetoric, all the way up to that faux-profound conclusion, the specific words matter less and less. This is a kind of frictionless eloquence that does indeed recall Don Quixote, his inexhaustible orations on chivalric lore. And once again, that Mariás is aware of what he's doing, as signaled by any number of self-referential passages ("Get to the point," Tupra tells Deza, "I get lost in your digressions"), is absolutely no excuse.

The ambition of *Your Face Tomorrow*, like its size, is unmistakably large. The novel consists of three volumes but seven parts, inciting comparison with Proust. This is Mariás's epic, and it is the nature of epic that it will sometimes bore us. *The Iliad*, *The Aeneid*, *The Divine Comedy*, *Don Quixote*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Prelude*, *Moby-Dick*, *Ulysses*, not to mention the Bible—all of these contain some rather formidable longueurs. Epic aims at plenitude; it wants to incorporate the whole of existence, make the work a mirror of the world. And if you want to be boring, Voltaire said, then say everything. But Mariás, whatever he thinks he might be doing, is not trying to say everything; he's only saying a few things, over and over and over again. The novel finally seems a kind of stunt. How much reflection can be balanced on how little action? How little matter can be stretched across how many pages? That *Your Face Tomorrow* is the work of a gifted writer is abundantly clear; that it is an epic failure is equally certain. ■



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*El Cuarteto* (The Quartet), 1981, by Rafael Ferrer

## An Art of Time

by BARRY SCHWABSKY

**S**hows by the peripatetic Puerto Rican-born artist Rafael Ferrer have been curiously sparse on the exhibition calendar in recent years, so his recent retrospective—or, as its title would have it, “Retro/Active”—at El Museo del Barrio in New York City was a welcome reminder of the powerful, protean *oeuvre* he has fashioned in more than half a century of artmaking. Forty years ago his work would have been hard to avoid. In 1969 he participated in three of the signal exhibitions of the new wave of conceptual, postminimal, process-oriented and “antiform” art that would dominate the scene for much of the next decade: “Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form” at the Kunsthalle Bern; “Op Losse Schroeven (Square Pegs in Round Holes)” at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and “Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials” at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The following year Ferrer had a one-man show at New York’s leading gallery, Leo Castelli, and took part in another now-

legendary group show, “Information” at the Museum of Modern Art.

Ferrer’s work from those days was not very prominently displayed at El Museo; however, much of it consisted of highly ephemeral installations of unconventional materials—piles of dead leaves and massive blocks of ice were particular favorites. In “Retro/Active” these were represented by means of a wall of small photographs that had been banished to a side room, although it would have been worth the trouble—a lot of trouble, admittedly—to re-create a couple of these ventures into what Carter Ratcliff has called “a medium that was part sculpture, part theater, part guerilla action on the aesthetic front.” By contrast, the more conventional paintings and sculptures Ferrer made in the 1950s and early ’60s, when he was still finding his way as an artist, were fully integrated into curator Deborah Cullen’s thematic (rather than chronological) traversal of Ferrer’s career, giving a possibly misleading sense of its overall shape.

Since the ’70s, Ferrer’s work has been strikingly polymorphous, ranging from sculpture and painting to drawing, collage and books. Just as he was associated with process art at the end of the ’60s, around 1980 he started making figurative paintings that seemed to be right in step with the Neo-Expressionism just then on the horizon. Journalists saw this style of painting as a rejection of the avant-garde of the ’70s; but in its crudity, the new painting was yet another attempt to start again from scratch, just as much of the art of the ’70s had been. More than a few of its protagonists, notably Francesco Clemente and David Salle, had, like Ferrer, first essayed the more conceptual aesthetics of the previous decade. I doubt, though, that their paintings would hold up anywhere near as well as Ferrer’s do today. For all the variousness of his efforts, it would be wrong to see Ferrer as an eclectic artist, one whose work lacks coherence or commitment—at least after his years of youthful experimentation, which admittedly lasted longer than is common these days. Born in 1933, he was already in his late 30s by the time he began making the process-oriented installations that can be considered his first mature works.

Along with several new texts, the catalog for “Retro/Active” reprints a long and searching essay by Ratcliff published in the catalog for an exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati in 1973. What’s remarkable about “Rafael Ferrer in the Tropical Sublime” is how descriptive it still seems today of the thinking behind Ferrer’s work, even of the work made over the subsequent thirty-seven years, much of which bears very little overt resemblance to anything the artist was doing back then. This is testimony, of course, to a critical perspicuity on Ratcliff’s part that practically amounts to prescience, but also to the fact that the multifariousness of Ferrer’s art nonetheless manifests a dogged insistence. He has simply taken as many approaches as possible to a few recurrent themes—or perhaps it would be better to say a few recurrent obsessions.

Ratcliff shows, too, that Ferrer’s work was always in fundamental tension with the context it appeared to be part of, in the first instance the new forms of art that developed in New York in the wake of minimalism. Think of Robert Morris, with whom Ferrer was closely linked at this time, or Richard Serra, whose works were only the residue of simple physical manipulations of materials as exemplified in his famous “Verb List Compilation”: “to roll,

to crease, to fold...to bundle, to heap, to gather, to scatter." Ferrer was undoubtedly concerned with the physical character of the materials he was using and with the visible changes one could see them undergo; but at the same time, as Ratcliff insists, he was always a Romantic with an ingrained faith in the power of symbol, myth and metaphor to give meaningful direction to life through art. In Ratcliff's view, Ferrer's use of autumn leaves was an invocation of Johnny Mercer's sentimental standard of that name and Shakespeare's Sonnet 73—literary and emotional references that were supposed to be taboo for sophisticated artists of the day, who were fundamentally empiricists, intent (as Ratcliff says) on "the construction of non-symbolic objects with no admitted reference to humanity or the natural world." Ferrer used natural materials with blatant symbolic implications, though with a bluntness that headed off any possibility of sentimentality or overly effusive lyricism.

Other early installations by Ferrer juxtaposed similarly transient materials with more solid, evidently sculptural ones, among them steel, tree trunks and neon lights. He also made self-contained sculptures, often in the form of kayaks and other kinds of boats, and began drawing, in crayon, maps of imaginary places. He was summoning the Romantic myth of the journey, the dream of exploration—which, of course, echoed his own real life, moving between Puerto Rico and the American mainland, not to mention Europe, where he had spent an important period in the 1950s, rubbing shoulders with the Surrealists and engaging in deep dialogue with Wifredo Lam, the Cuban-born painter whose work attempted to synthesize a formal syntax derived from Cubism and Surrealism with an iconog-

## from *Revelator*

Eternity in the present only  
I shut my eyes, inhale  
deeply to hear five speakers'  
simultaneous yatter, squirrels up high  
in the cedars bark, dog  
golden terrier blend all taut  
muscle, sinew o'er bone, jaw  
pauses mid-air in flight, just  
ahead of the Frisbee's grasp

RON SILLIMAN

raphy reflecting his culture's African and Indian roots. Ferrer's use of crayons shows his attraction to the pictorial expressiveness of children, the untutored, people on the margins—another Romantic theme—and he also used them to design masklike forms on paper bags, something he still does today. This multitude of faces constitutes a marvelous vocabulary of legible forms in which observation and invention become indistinguishable.

**W**hat separates Ferrer's paintings of the 1980s and '90s from the Neo-Expressionism with which they might have been confused (and which they might have influenced) is a predominance of observation. If the art of the 1960s and '70s, for all the brilliance of its innovations, was rendered too narrow (and, ultimately, academic) by its extreme empiricism, which ruled out of bounds so much of art's potential material, then the besetting sin of the art that in the 1980s emerged in reaction against it would have to be an excessive subjectivism, an overindulgence in the cultivation of what Harald Szeemann dubbed "individual mythologies" unchecked by any significant external reality. In an interview with Alex Katz, Ferrer says, "I know that I am attracted to German Expressionism, Neue Sachlichkeit, Dix, Beckmann," which might seem to underline an affinity for the later Neo-Expressionists as well, but like the early twentieth-century Expressionists and unlike the Neo-Expressionists of the 1980s, he was finding his symbols in an encounter with reality, and one with an immediate political dimension at that: the subaltern.

In 1975, after nearly a decade spent mostly in Philadelphia, Ferrer again began spending much of his time in Puerto Rico; in 1985 he gave up his home there for one in the Dominican Republic. It was in Puerto Rico that Ferrer seriously took up painting, after a visit from Katz suddenly convinced him that painting from observation still had a future; and the subject matter of nearly all his best painting has come from his experience of the islands. This has led to misunderstandings. When a critic referred to his style as "faux primitivism," Ferrer objected that the characterization was based on a prejudice about the people he depicted rather than on his way of painting them. "They can call the people in the paintings natives or they can call them inhabitants of this place or the other, *but I call them neighbors.*"

Actually, some of the first paintings Fer-

rer made after his return to the medium do betray a certain primitivism. I'm thinking of works like *El Cuarteto* (The Quartet) or *Melida la Reina* (Melida the Queen), both from 1981, which almost seem like elaborations of his paper-bag mask fantasies. But by mid-decade his style had become distinctly more sophisticated, settling into a sturdy Modernism that would not have looked outrageous to any of Ferrer's early twentieth-century heroes but with a personal inflection that could never be confused with anyone else's. Ferrer's brush is tough, unsentimental; he prefers to show things bluntly rather than suavely coaxing them into visibility. His pictorial space can seem almost hammered into place—as if an imprint of his work as a sculptor. His use of the word "neighbors" to describe his subjects is quite precise. In painting the people who lived near him in the Dominican Republic, he was painting neither familiars—it is telling that although Ferrer has done self-portraits, he has rarely painted his family or close friends—nor complete strangers. Wariness and curiosity register in the faces of many of Ferrer's subjects, although others appear more ingenuous. There is no false familiarity here, but rather a distance to be negotiated. And it can be negotiated.

A curious light is shed on Ferrer's art by learning that as a young man he was as deeply involved in music as in painting and sculpture, playing drums professionally in Latin bands until 1966. One of the exhibition's thematic sections is devoted to representations of music and musicians, making it clear that his fascination with music never abated. The relation between music and the other arts was one of the great themes of Modernism; in the European tradition, where the musical reference was always to the great tradition of classical concert music, this usually pointed toward the possibility of abstraction. Just as a string quartet needs no literary program, neither does a painting. For Ferrer, the implications are different because the music he has in mind comes from a different tradition. "My instrument is the drum," he explained in 1971. "It minimizes all the other assets that music has, like harmony and tone, and concentrates on the fundamental point of time and the ability to split time in ways that are intricate and inventive, and to do that under pressure, which comes from the fact that musical decisions are made at a high rate of speed—they are literally split-second decisions. So they require intuition and the ability to take chances within a structure which has time as a critical element." Ferrer's understand-

ing of the significance of music is hardly opposed to its potential for abstractness, but neither is that the main point. Instead, Ferrer calls for an aesthetic of spontaneous responsiveness irrespective of subject (or lack thereof)—an aesthetic just as applicable to the figurative painting he would take up a decade later and the seemingly abstract yet symbolically resonant installations he was making at the time. For that matter, his most inventive and intricate elaborations of the structure of time will undoubtedly turn out to have been his paintings. It's a pleasure to see them again after so long.

**F**errer's quasi manifesto for music as the fundamental aesthetic is worth keeping in mind when visiting "Christian Marclay: Festival," at the Whitney (through September 26). The Swiss-American artist, born in 1955, might seem to have very little in common with his Puerto Rican elder, yet Marclay is just as insistent as Ferrer that music, as an art of time, can be a model for visual art—if anything, he is even more so. Unlike Ferrer, Marclay has no musical training. But as an art student in Boston in 1979, inspired like many of his generation by punk rock, which "had freed people from the idea that you had to be skilled to play music," he began performing, or as he puts it, "inventing ways to make music when not a musician." Since he couldn't play an instrument, he began working with musical ready-mades, using vinyl records and turntables as instruments, not unlike the breakbeat DJs who'd started working with the same equipment to revolutionary effect in the Bronx just a few years before, albeit to very different effect. Soon he started treating his records as sculptural material, cutting them up and recombining the pieces to create visual collages that were also bearers of sound collages.

By now, Marclay has become something of a virtuoso of the turntable; the correlate of the punk notion that you don't need to be skilled to make music is that if you keep making music you will become skilled, though possibly in unusual ways. Increasingly, he has collaborated with trained musicians; and although he still calls himself an artist, he is highly respected as a composer of the avant-garde, even though he does not read or write conventional notation. At the same time, he has continued to use music, records, record covers, musical instruments and images of music and music-making as material for sculpture, collage and video as well as performance.

Not all of this work is at the Whitney;

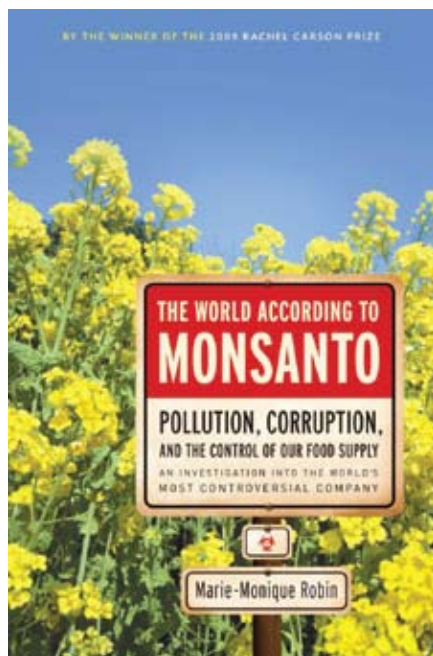
"Festival" is not a full-dress retrospective. Instead, in keeping a fairly tight focus on the notion of the "visual score," curators David Kiehl and Limor Tomer give a concise cross section of his *oeuvre* that shows it to advantage, despite the absence of some of his best work. Among these I should at least mention two: the astonishing *Video Quartet* (2002), a four-channel projection that conjures up a new, fourteen-minute-long piece of music out of more than 700 brief clips taken mostly from Hollywood movies—scenes in which people are shown making music or at least making sounds; and *Tape Fall* (1989), a sculpture consisting of a reel-to-reel tape recorder mounted high up above one's head, playing a tape of the sound of trickling water that, instead of being taken up by a second reel, falls in elegant coils to form an ever-rising pile on the floor. One misses such pieces but not the relatively large quantity of facile, one-linerish works for which Marclay has also been responsible—for instance, assemblages of record covers that create grotesque figures out of, say, a solemnly gesturing orchestra conductor from the waist up matched with a ballerina *en pointe* from the waist down. In fact, the very notion of the visual score works against the one-liner. It means there

always has to be at least a double take—one's perception of the graphic form should be followed by an effort to understand how it might be understood as a series of cues for making music.

The idea of the visual score—or graphic notation, as it is often called—is hardly a new one, originating with the composers of the New York School of the 1950s: Earle Brown, John Cage, Morton Feldman and Christian Wolff. But Marclay not only pursues the idea to unheard-of extremes; he turns it on its ear. When a composer presents the performer with a graphic score that may allow far more interpretive leeway than a conventional score would, he still has some basic sonic parameters in mind—and in any case, the score was produced with the idea of making music. That's not always the case with Marclay, for whom the visual takes precedence. And he sometimes asks performers to use as scores things that were never intended to have anything to do with music.

*Shuffle* (2007) is a deck of seventy-five cards with photographs taken by Marclay. Each shows an image of musical notation found in "real life"—that is to say, on billboards, candy boxes, T-shirts, cars, cakes, umbrellas, teacups—anywhere that a musi-

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cal note might serve a decorative purpose, but not where it would have been meant to be read as a basis for making music. Yet this is what Marclay proposes: using this deck of cards as a recombinant score. What any given performer might make of, say, a single quaver crossed out, no particular tone specified, or a bunch of notes splashed across a staff with only two rather than five lines is entirely unpredictable; someone who went to hear pianist Anthony Coleman perform *Shuffle* on August 4 will undoubtedly have heard something with no discernible resemblance to either the version created by the duo of Robin Holcomb and Wayne Horvitz on August 26 or what the great Canadian artist and musician Michael Snow will come up with on September 26. But even for those of us who could never make music out of these paltry and absurd signs, the effort to imagine doing so makes us see the images differently.

Another photographic piece with a somewhat more complicated genesis is *Graffiti Composition* (1996–2002). In 1996 Marclay had posters of blank staff paper printed and posted all over Berlin. Soon enough, the posters were torn and marked up by passers-by, half covered with other postings, written over—sometimes even with music. The results were photographed, and now these too constitute a score, also being performed several times during the course of the exhibition. From poster installation to photograph to score for an unpredictable sound event: “I like these evolving structures,” Marclay says, “where I eventually lose control.”

Not only graphic signs have a capacity to score the unforeseeable. Marclay conceives even some of his video works as scores, while *Mixed Reviews* (1999–2010) is a wall text made from excerpts spliced together from all kinds of music reviews, taking only the parts where the writer was trying to describe a specific sound or sound quality. The performer’s task is to produce this sequence of sounds—a task perhaps made even more challenging by a twist: the piece has been displayed and performed in various countries; each time it is re-presented, it is translated into the language of the host country, and the subsequent version is translated in turn from that, not from the original English. This means that the text shown now at the Whitney is several generations removed from its first version—and presumably the sound sequences it might evoke are different as well.

As much as the sonic matter of music, Marclay takes much of his material from

what might be called music’s mythologies—in Roland Barthes’s sense of that word. Unlike Ferrer, who would rather create symbols, Marclay prefers to deconstruct them. He cites conceptual artist Douglas Huebler’s motto, so typical of the 1960s: “The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more.” But by reusing existing images, existing records, existing video footage, he comes closer to refraining from adding more meanings than more objects. Yet his work conceals a certain unresolved irony. It is possible to devise out of the banality of our visual environment a score that does not commit the composer—if that is still the right word—to any particular musi-

cal statement. Doing so has the desirable effect, at least momentarily, of scrubbing some elements of that environment clean of those heavily stereotyped meanings that constitute its banality, allowing one to see it as also rather wonderful. But the performer who interprets this score, who might also be its composer (Marclay will join singer Shelley Hirsch in musically interpreting the digital slide projection piece *Zoom Zoom*, 2007–09, on September 22), has no choice but to choose this sound rather than that, this structure rather than that, this myth rather than that. Deconstructing the old mythologies only clears the way for developing new ones. “Absence,” as Marclay says, “is a void to be filled with one’s own stories.” ■

## The Book of Amos

by BEN EHRENREICH

Somewhere deep in the *Ha’aretz* archives lies a photograph of a 14-year-old Gideon Levy posing atop an abandoned Syrian tank. The Six-Day War had just ended, and young Levy and his parents were on a tour of the freshly occupied West Bank. His photo, Levy says, ended up in the pages of the newspaper that would eventually employ him, though that is the least—and the least painful—of the many attending ironies. Now 57 with a heavy, falconish face, Levy is hard to picture as a boy. It’s harder still to imagine his expression. Was he gleeful? Puzzled? Somber? Was he trying to look brave?

Levy has been writing for *Ha’aretz* for nearly three decades. In recent years, he has settled into a stable if uncomfortable role as Israel’s latest Amos, admired and despised for thumping his staff twice each week to admonish his compatriots for the crimes committed in their names—and by their sons and neighbors—just out of sight on the other side of the wall. When that photo was taken in 1967, though, Levy was not yet the *bête noire* of the Israeli right—and just as often of the Zionist left—but, in his words, a “good boy” from Tel Aviv. The child of refugees—his parents fled Europe in 1939—Levy grew up in an environment that was not political except in the most conventional ways. As Levy said in an interview with the Irish journalist David Cronin earlier this year, “I was totally blind...a



### The Punishment of Gaza

by Gideon Levy.

Verso. 148 pp. Paper \$15.95.

typical product of the Israeli brainwash system.” That day on the West Bank, he was as carried away as most of his compatriots in what he has called the “nationalistic tsunami” that followed the 1967 war. It did not seem odd that he saw no Palestinians in Palestine, only white sheets of surrender hanging from the balconies. To the extent that he thought about them, he imagined that Palestinians must be grateful for the Israeli presence, but he didn’t think about them much. “The Palestinians themselves were nonentities,” he said in another interview. “They didn’t exist.”

*Ben Ehrenreich, a journalist and novelist based in Los Angeles, is the author of The Suitors.*

Levy's transformation would be gradual. He suffered no lightning-bolt revelation, no fall from an ass. He received his journalistic training while serving at the Israeli Defense Force's radio station, hardly an environment that encourages dissent. In that capacity, he witnessed things that troubled him: settlers destroying olive groves, checkpoint soldiers harassing Palestinian women. But he dismissed these incidents as unfortunate exceptions to an occupation that was generally humane. "It took me a long time to see that these were not exceptions," Levy said. "They were the substance of government policy."

On the local political spectrum, Levy was a liberal, and thoroughly mainstream. He took a job in 1979 as press officer for then-Labor Party head Shimon Peres. (In a column last year, he dismissed his old boss, now the Israeli president, as "a small man, devoid of any sense of justice...our beautiful and misleading face.") Three years later, Levy began writing for the left-leaning *Ha'aretz*. When he started to cover the Occupied Territories for the paper in 1982, he was, he says, still "totally ignorant, totally brainwashed." But he slowly began to view the occupation as the central drama of Israeli society, a narrative all the more important because it was so thoroughly repressed. "I always brought exclusive stories because almost nobody was there," Levy has boasted.

By the time Israeli troops opened fire on the taxi carrying Levy to the West Bank city of Tulkarm in 2003, his transformation was complete. As he tells the story, soldiers manning a checkpoint directed his driver toward an army base outside the city. Without warning, soldiers at the base opened fire on the car, focusing their fire at the center of the windshield. "They shot it like someone else lights a cigarette," Levy said at the time. "And they do it on a daily basis." Had the taxi not been bulletproofed, Levy says, he would not have survived. And had he been Palestinian, he knew, the incident would have passed without notice. Instead, Levy was interviewed on American TV and received a personal apology from the minister of defense.

In the years since, Levy has made it his exclusive mission—his "exasperating calling," as he puts it in the introduction to *The Punishment of Gaza*, a collection of his recent work—to document the grim and brutal facts of the occupation, to tell the stories he knows Israelis do not want to hear. He writes tirelessly and furiously, with all the bitter passion of the disenchanted.

He writes as if trying to kill whatever might be left of his own illusions, as if trying to fill the empty West Bank streets he walked through so complacently in 1967 with faces, voices, stories. Week after week, he writes of entire families killed in IDF missile attacks, of sick and injured Palestinians who die at checkpoints waiting to cross into Israel for treatment. Levy spares no details. He wastes no ink in search of moral nuance. In a column published just after Rosh Hashana in 2007, he recounts the deaths of some of the ninety-two Palestinian children killed in the previous 365 days. (A year of relative mercy, it turned out.) "The first of them was buried twice," Levy writes. "Abdullah al-Zakh identified half of the body of his son Mahmoud in the morgue refrigerator of Shifa Hospital in Gaza." The rest of the boy's remains could not be recovered until after Israeli forces withdrew. Several dozen children later, Levy ends the column with the words "Happy New Year."

His outspokenness has rendered him a pariah to many of his countrymen and Israel's supporters abroad, a status he appears to relish. *Ha'aretz*, he says, keeps a file labeled "cancellation of subscription—Gideon Levy." It is getting "bigger and bigger from week to week," Levy says.

One of the incidents recounted in that New Year's column would be the occasion for Levy's last trip to Gaza. The IDF had attacked a school bus. Two children and their 20-year-old teacher were killed. In November 2006, shortly after the funeral held for the teacher (whose name, for the record, was Najweh Khalif), the government closed Gaza to all Israeli journalists on the pretext that it could not guarantee their security. The national media offered no real fight. "Instead of protesting," Levy notes, "journalists collaborate." The Strip is usually open to foreign reporters, but Israelis now have only secondhand access to what Levy calls "the largest prison on earth." Most of the essays included in *The Punishment of Gaza* were therefore written from the sidelines.

This is not the disadvantage it might seem. Levy's real subject, even when he's writing about events in Rafah or Khan Yunis, is Israel, its hypocrisy, the myths and delusions with which it cloaks itself. Life is good in Tel Aviv, "peachy" even. "Like Switzerland? No...better." The cafes and beaches are packed. The economy is booming, the occupation invisible and apparently cost-free. To this shiny nation—democratic, prosperous, confident in its righteousness—Levy holds up Gaza like a mirror. "Israel is

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the occupation. The occupation is Israel," he writes. This is who we really are, he says and says again. Gaza's streets are thick with trash and sewage, but the real pollution, Levy says, is the moral kind, and it lies on the Israeli side of the wall.

In Levy's Israel, "everything is tainted"—not just the military and state institutions but the teachers who fail to protest the closing of Palestinian schools, the engineers who build the fences and roads between the settlements, "the journalists who do not report, the artists and writers who remain silent." Levy names names: the usual rightist politicians as well as their abettors on the left who, despite their gentler rhetoric, prove murderous in practice; his liberal Zionist colleagues at *Ha'aretz*; and the internationally respected intellectuals (David Grossman, Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua) who helped legitimate the 2008–09 attack on Gaza that left 1,400 Palestinians dead.

Levy's moral vision has its blind spots. Gaza is not, after all, a mirror. It is Gaza, home to 1.4 million Palestinians, who rarely emerge from Levy's writing as anything other than the objects of Israeli cruelty. To the extent that Levy's explicit goal is to hold his own people to account ("Yes, it must be written. It must be shouted out"), this shouldn't be an issue. But it does at times cause him to trip rather badly, as in a column from early 2009, in the midst of the Gaza assault, in which he writes that "the darkness into which we have plunged Gaza is nothing compared to the thick black darkness that has descended on Israel." Few Gazans would likely have agreed.

That assault and the overwhelming support it enjoyed in Israel pushed Levy fully into Old Testament mode. With the commencement of Operation Cast Lead, as the IDF labeled it, his rhetoric shifts in timbre. "Our hearts have become hard and our eyes have become dull," he writes in January 2009. "An evil spirit has descended on the land," he writes three days later. "Israelis know deep within their desensitized hearts that something terrible is burning beneath their feet, that a vast conflagration is threatening to burst through the thick, stupefying, contorting and obfuscating fog that covers them."

Levy is at his sharpest, though, when he throws off the sackcloth and devotes himself to the demystification of political language, to revealing the ways in which words are "mobilized in active reserve service" to hide the injustices of the occupation. Start with

the "peace process," which Levy (in a 2009 essay unfortunately not included in this collection) calls "the great fraud—the best show in town," and which, he argues, has functioned for decades to provide shelter for everyone who stands to profit by keeping the conflict rolling. Forever en route to another photo-op negotiation sensation, "We talk and talk, babble and prattle, and generally feel great about ourselves; meanwhile the settlements expand endlessly and Israel turns to the use of force at every possible opportunity."

Then there is "security," that final-sum good of the new millennium that Levy calls "society's true religion," as simultaneously omnipresent and unattainable as the great Ein Soph of kabbalistic doctrine. For the sake of this esoteric goal, Israel engages in something called "war" in Gaza and Lebanon. But what sort of wars are these, Levy asks, in which fighter jets bomb "unimpeded as if on practice runs"; tanks shell homes, hospitals and schools; and, in the case of Gaza, one of the best-equipped armies in the world fights "a helpless population and a weak, ragged organization that has fled the conflict zones and is barely putting up a fight"?

Levy goes on: "We 'liberated' the territories, 'preempted' the terrorists and 'preserved order,' the order of occupation; we consolidated the occupation with a 'civil administration,' being careful not to cause a 'humanitarian disaster,' jailed people in 'administrative detention'...murdered with 'rules of engagement.'" Does this sound familiar? It should—it's our language, too, the vocabulary of the occupier, as useful to Bush and Obama as to Bibi and Barak. And Levy has words for us, Israel's greatest friends. A million people read *Ha'aretz* in English online, after all, and fewer than 70,000 read the paper in Hebrew at home.

If Levy has lost hope that Israeli society can ever be awakened from its apathy, his optimism resides abroad, and particularly with us. Only pressure from the United States of the variety that Obama has not yet had the stomach for, Levy has written, will push Israel toward anything that might honestly be termed peace. And so, significantly, the first essay in *The Punishment of Gaza* calls for a different sort of international pressure. "It is not easy to call upon the world to boycott your own country," Levy writes, but only under the pressure of cultural isolation and economic divestment will Israelis "begin to understand, albeit the hard way, that there is a price to pay for the occupation." ■

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# Puzzle No. 1598

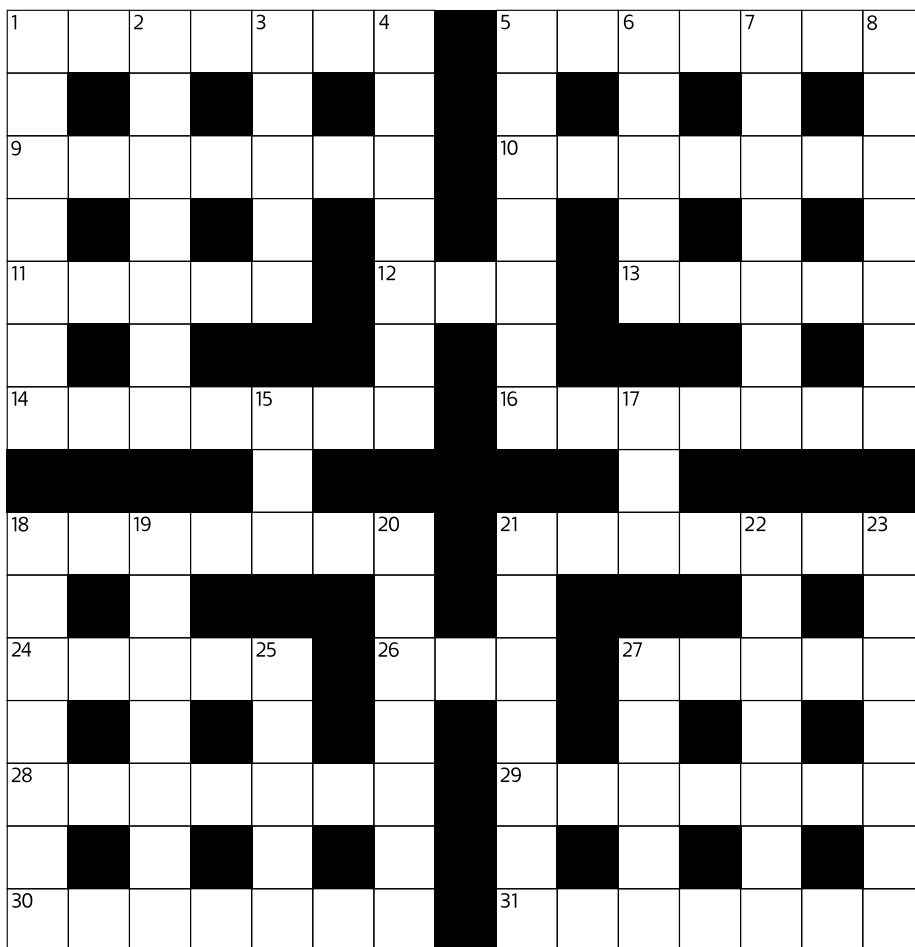
FRANK W. LEWIS

## ACROSS

- 1 and 10 Story of a rescue operation which might redound to your credit. (7,7)  
 5 See 4 down  
 9 It comes from the islands of Langerhans. (7)  
 10 See 1 across  
 11 Retreats from an absence of approval? (5)  
 12 See 17 down  
 13 Such a popular gentleman is obviously big-hearted. (5)  
 14 The order is evidently slack at the end of vacation. (4,3)  
 16 Remnants around can prove standard signs. (7)  
 18 Supply for the crossword aficionado, presented with some flourish. (7)  
 21 and 24 Where jumpers are perhaps worn after being pressed. (12)  
 26 See 17 down  
 27 Pertaining to an element of a crib. (5)  
 28 Poorly clued in, or at least put in. (7)  
 29 These should be of some assistance. (7)  
 30 What a movie Westerner sometimes doesn't like, and possibly resents. (7)  
 31 GI beds were sometimes short this. (7)

## DOWN

- 1 and 18 down Future accounts probably made on speculation. (7,7)  
 2 Hardly a flowing description! (7)  
 3 They don't stand for anything! (5)  
 4 and 5 across What the scrutinizer of 1-10 hopes to make is important to the cyclist. (5,2,7)  
 5 You'll find a number in worse circumstances in pigskin. (7)  
 6 A close call might leave you numb, but it might indicate frequent stops. (5)  
 7 Non-charged as being possibly non-true. (7)  
 8 Likes to have the set seem of a different pattern. (7)  
 15 See 17 down  
 17, 12, 15, 22 and 26 After 24 hours, one can't find fault with it now! (3,3,2,1,7,3)  
 18 See 1 down  
 19 Sort of cane sun shades. (7)  
 20 Evidently the 22-26 of song wasn't this! (7)  
 21 They might be responsible for the cut of the grain. (7)  
 22 See 17 down  
 23 Typically objective in the finish, but all wrapped up meanwhile. (7)  
 25 Did the one that got away? (5)  
 27 You might say it's swell, but not uniformly. (5)



This puzzle originally appeared in the September 13, 1975, issue.

## SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 1597

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B | A | T | H | S | A | L | T | S |   | S | T | O | I | C |
| L | I | T | U | E |   | A | P | L |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| E | N | T | E | R | I | C |   | C | O | S | T | U | M | E |
| A | A |   | A | K | O |   | H | L | R |   |   |   |   |   |
| K | I | N |   | T | R | I | N | G |   | Y | E | G | G |   |
|   |   |   | I | E | D | D |   | V | N | Y |   |   |   |   |
| C | H | A | N | G | E | O | F |   | B | O | T | T | O | M |
| A |   |   |   | I | G |   | H | C |   |   |   |   |   | A |
| R | E | S | I | S | T |   | T | A | X | A | T | I | O | N |
| D | P |   | T | H | N |   | L |   | N |   |   |   |   |   |
| B | L | O | W |   | M | A | D | D | O | G |   | H | O | T |
| O | N |   | C | N |   | B |   | R | O |   | I |   |   |   |
| A | N | D | C | O | L | D |   | O | R | O | T | U | N | D |
| R | E |   | W |   | E |   | D |   | U |   | S |   | E |   |
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